

*By Nikolai Gubsky*

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ITS SILLY FACE  
MATTHEW'S PASSION  
SURPRISE ITEM

Q13529.

# ANGRY DUST

AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY

BY

NIKOLAI GUBSKY



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For

MY CHILDREN XENIA AND KIRIL

in the firm conviction that truth, however coarse  
and unpalatable, is better food for the mind than  
any pleasing and well-meaning invention.





*“The Lord regards not merit or demerit, nor do men suffer because  
of sin,  
But because their knowledge is veiled with ignorance.”*

**THE BHAGAVAD-GITA**



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## P R E F A C E

THIS AUTOBIOGRAPHY is unorthodox in at least two ways.

Firstly, I have very little to say about Prominent People. I have met a few, but apart from their specific achievements they seemed to me quite ordinary, less interesting than some who were outside publicity. Also my contact with them was casual, and I believe that only Personal Relationships are worth writing about.

Secondly, I shall leave politics alone. Quite enough has been written already about the period I know best, the twilight of Tsarism.

My intention is to write an autobiography in the strict sense of the word, that is to say, the story of how I became—or rather tried to become—myself. But, of course, if I only wrote about this, my book would be unspeakably dull. Therefore I shall present my main theme in a weak solution, generously diluting it with material which really belongs to the province of Memoirs, that is to say events which happened to me and around me.

In doing so I shall not attempt to “explain” myself in the sense of accounting for what I am by what my environment was. This can never be done, Biography cannot be derived from Memoirs. To explain, for instance, the bitter disposition of a man by the fact that he was badly treated in his youth is as senseless as to say that his eyes are blue because as a baby he used to gaze at the sky. Millions of babies have done that, and yet have got black, brown, or green eyes; in the same way, millions of youths have been maltreated and yet became gentle or happy-go-lucky or detached—anything but embittered. Environment is all-powerful in the realm of inanimate matter where it wholly determines shape, weight, temperature, etc. But it does not quite explain the ingenuity of a monkey or the devotion of a dog, and it only affects man

superficially, supplying the material for his motives, but not the motives themselves; determining some of his reactions, but not his style of reacting; shaping the events of his life, but not that unrepeatable psychic whole which makes him different from everybody else in the world and constitutes his Personality. Personality is not made but, like the face, given from the start; it is not formed by events, but passes through them, obeying its own laws of growth, now expressing itself in action, now failing to do so, assuming somebody else's manners, but remaining even then equal to itself, just as a face, while reflecting the most different emotions, remains the same individual face. Personality is as inexplicable as the universe: one can never say *why* a man is what he is, but only *how* he lives, that is to say, how he reacts in time to:

things,  
happenings,  
other men,  
and life as a whole.

I happen to have no inhibitions about what my friends call "undressing myself in public." I simply do not see why any of my actions, positive, negative or neutral, should be concealed from anybody. Perhaps this means that I am indiscreet by nature; perhaps that I have no false shame; I do not care which. In so far as other people are concerned I shall have to bow to necessity and make some of them unrecognisable, which is easily done by altering their appearance and their surroundings; otherwise, this book will be truth unadorned and, what is more, without omissions. There are two episodes in it which I badly wanted to leave out, but in the end I overruled myself. I also overruled the opposition of my wife, who hates showing herself to the public and objected to all the chapters which relate to her. I know I am seriously hurting her by publishing this book; but, in the first place, I have nothing but good to say of her, she being one of those rare women who never, in any circumstances, descend from their own high level; secondly, I shall only mention her in so far as she shares my experiences; and

thirdly, I do believe that for the sake of a really truthful narrative it is worth hurting one or two people.

As my novels are largely autobiographical, those who have read them are bound to recognise some of the characters and incidents in this book. I apologise for repeating myself, but it could not be helped, since otherwise there would be huge gaps in the story.





# PART ONE



## CHILDHOOD

I OPEN my eyes. A pillar of sunlight, alive with minute, slowly rotating specks of dust, slants across the nursery, between my green toy-box and the window. Beyond the window, on the roof opposite, a fringe of thawing icicles glistens blindingly in the morning sun; in the dining-room Mama is rattling the china; a faint smell of vanilla pervades the air of the nursery, and suddenly I remember: it is Easter Sunday to-day, the greatest holiday of the year. I visualise the festive table with its red cloth, painted eggs, chocolate birds and round almond-covered cakes; I think of the mysterious presents which await me, and the beautiful singing I am going to hear in the church; and all this—Mama's footsteps, the presents, the spring and the cakes—fuses into one overwhelming sensation of Easter happiness and exultant love, love for myself, my parents, everybody and everything. I want to get up, rush to Mama and press myself against the lilac silk blouse which she always wears on holidays; and at the same time I want to stay in my warm cosy bed, looking at the bright blue sky above the icicles, letting the joy throb in my body. . . .

Our house in Petersburg had a balcony. In winter its door was closed and the chinks were stuffed with waste and putty so as to prevent any draught. In May the maid would scratch out the putty with a knife, and then my sister and I could go out on to the balcony. We used to stand there for hours watching the cabs, the passers-by, the dogs and the hawkers with carts of cranberries, ice-cream, and pickled apples. One day when a cabman stopped right under our balcony I took the glass stopper of a decanter and dropped it on his head, to see what would happen. It hit him in the middle of his felt hat and I quickly stepped back from the railings, but he saw me all the same, shouted something at

me, and started climbing down from his seat. I knew at once that I would get a spanking from Papa, and so I did.

I had a zoo, a huge two-storeyed zoo with a dozen compartments, and wire in front of them. I fed the tiger and the lion with bits of cutlet, and the elephant with cabbage leaves. The elephant was my favourite, because he was the strongest and the cleverest of the lot. When Lisa broke his leg, I went to her room and banged her on the head. She howled and looked so disgusting that I hit her again, and then Mama came in and spanked me. But it did not hurt because I pulled in my seat every time she struck, and I said I would hit Lisa again if she touched my things.

At the end of our street were the Pushkin Gardens. It was a silly name because *Pushka* in Russian means a gun, and there were no guns there, only the statue of a black man reading a book all the time. One could not do anything in that garden except run round and round the statue, so I would pester *Fräulein* till she took us to Nevsky Avenue. That was great fun: we saw wonderful things in the shop windows, and horse-drawn omnibuses, and policemen in white gloves, and soldiers with real rifles. One day we even saw guns; *Fräulein* called them *entillery* and I was a little afraid they might go off.

In May, after the melting of the snow, we used to go to Terrvi, our country place in Finland, where we stayed till the birches turned yellow. Everything in Terrvi was wonderful: Serko, the pony, who was old and lazy but could run very fast downhill; Boy, our setter, with a torn ear and a funny wriggling nose; the kitchen garden with carrots, red currants and gooseberries; the stream full of minnows and tadpoles. In the evening Papa would set round nets with bits of meat, and in the morning every net had a slimy black crayfish in it. In the moss by the stream we used to find wild honey; it is much better than ordinary honey, but one must not take it when the bees are about. The slope on the opposite bank was red with wild strawberries in July, and in August we gathered mush-

rooms there; they grew in such quantities that we did not touch the big ones and only picked the babies, with long straight stalks and firm black tops. Cook fried them with sour cream.

Sometimes we drove over to Pittkijärve, a lake in the woods. The drive was so exciting that I had to hold my breath so as not to shout aloud. Lisa, of course, would yell all the time and dance about on her seat, because she was a girl. At the end of the lake there was a mountain, frightfully high and steep. It was the top of the world; from it you could see as far as a thousand miles, and it was all forest, green at first and blue further away where the clouds came from. When I stood on the top I always wanted to wave my hands and cry at the same time, I do not know why.

After Terrvi, Petersburg seemed very dull. It rained and rained. Lisa did not know how to play properly, so we quarrelled a lot. I ceased caring for my zoo: the elephant had only two legs left, and you could see the wire in the tiger's neck. The best days were Sundays, because Zina came then. I thought her very beautiful; she had huge black eyes and we played Animals: I was a tiger and roared, and she squeaked like a giraffe. I stalked her, climbing under the chairs and the sofa, and finally killed her: she lay quite still, and I bit her throat, pretending I was eating her. We sneezed because of the dust, and then Zina's Mademoiselle came to take her home. Mademoiselle looked like a herring and was a damn fool; and when Zina was gone I hated Lisa.

Pavel Pavlitch, my tutor, had a long drooping nose. As soon as I saw his nose I felt bored and simply could not listen to what he said. I did not like school either. I wished I were a Jew, because the Jews did not have Scripture. Herr Kallnin, our German master, had a face exactly like our porter Semyon. One day he was dictating: *Die Gäste sind gekommen*. I was then third in the form and Papa wanted me to be first, but I saw no point in being first, so I made a mistake on purpose: I struck out *Gäste* which I had written and wrote *Gesste* instead.

About that time Nina, my second sister, was born. I remember nothing about it.

I decided to write a book explaining why it was that as we came nearer to a thing it grew bigger. I knew why, I had tried it out with mirrors and it was very simple. But I did not know how to begin, so the book never got written.

Papa was promoted, and the messenger from the Senate\* who brought the leather cases with the blue files would say: "This is for His Excellency." I felt very proud. "Papa, am I also an Excellency now?" I asked. He said I was not. "But I'm a nobleman like you, aren't I?" Then he got cross for no reason, and told me to get these snobbish ideas out of my head. I did not know what snobbish meant, and I thought he was unfair to me, just bullying.

One day he went to a Court Ball. Before going he had a row with Mama, who could not fasten the orders on his chest. But he himself did not know how it should be done, so in the end he laughed and kissed her, and they made it up. Then he took his sword, which was a fine sword, with a golden handle and a tassel, but as it would not go into the hole in his coat he grew angry and called it a bloody toothpick. From the ball he brought us some toffee wrapped in pink paper with silver eagles on it. They were so nasty that I could not eat them at all. Lisa ate half of one—she could eat anything—and threw the rest into the waste-paper-basket.

Then came the unlucky summer. We only went to Terrvi in June, because Mama was ill. I did not know what was the matter with her, and she would not tell me. Instead of going into the woods with us, she would lie down and put a compress on her head, and sometimes she kept the compress on all night.

One morning I saw Boy, our setter, sitting back on his haunches and howling at our house with his head thrown as far back as it would go. I did not like it, and Lisa's Nanny

\* Supreme Court of Appeal, or rather Court of Cassation.

did not like it either: she said it was a bad omen when a dog howled like that, so I shouted: "Boy, stop!" but he went on all the same. Nanny was right about the omen, because after lunch we suddenly noticed smoke coming out of the roof of the house: the garret was on fire. The Finns who were working behind the stables came running with pails of water and put the fire out.

But that was not all. That same night, when we were all in bed, a thunderstorm broke out. A window frame in our bedroom was torn off its hinges and fell with a terrific crash; the wind blew out the oil lamp before the ikon; Boy, who slept in the hall, started howling; Nanny from the attic yelled Help and Murder . . . And here I have to stop, for if I went on I would have to describe how my mother went mad before my eyes, stark, raving mad; and that I cannot do. More than thirty years have passed since, but even now, when I remember the details of that night, my breath goes wrong and I feel weak about the knees and shoulders.

Anyhow, the following day we were back in Petersburg, and the day after that Father was seeing me off at the railway station: I was going to Germany. "Give my love to the Hertzbergs," he said. "I will," I said, and as I could not bear to look at him I turned away and read what was written on the carriage: *Compagnie Internationale des Wagons-Lits*. The station bell rang three times. "Get in now," said Father and kissed me. His hair had turned grey in those two days, and the cigar in his hand was trembling. I said Good-bye, and suddenly—I could not help it, because I had no idea it was coming—I started screaming and sobbing. "There, there," said Father. "You'll forget it, we'll both forget it." People came along and helped him to put me into the carriage, for the train was starting already.

A lady who was in my compartment gave me water to drink, and I splashed it all over her. By the time I had quietened down, the train had left the suburbs and was travelling at a speed which seemed astounding to me, who had never been in a fast train before. Were we doing fifty? I wondered. Or eighty? Or perhaps a hundred? I asked the



lady, but she did not know. Then she asked me all sorts of questions, and I told her that I was going to Germany, that I had ten roubles, ten marks, and a foreign passport with seals, the same as grown-ups had. "You are a brave young man," she said, and I liked her very much. We dined in the restaurant car, and she paid for me, so that saved a rouble. In the evening I climbed on to the upper berth, and she put out the light. The night before, I had been lying curled up, shutting my eyes as tight as I could, and praying to God: "Take me away—kill me—I don't want to live." Now I looked out of the window at the sparks which crossed the darkness outside, and I felt thrilled at the thought that I, an eleven-year-old boy, was travelling all by myself in a smart train which even had *Internationale* written on the carriages; I thought that with my money I would buy an air-gun and three thousand slugs; I wondered whether all the Germans had the same porter-faces as Herr Kallnin at my old school; I felt excited and sleepy with excitement. . . . Hallowed be Thy name, *Sancta Stultitia*, Mother of Oblivion, Protectress of children and multitudes!

I have re-read the preceding paragraphs, and to my disappointment I find very little of myself in them, only glimpses of that peculiar psychic unity that was I at the time. I see that most of the reactions I have described are not specifically mine but universal. All boys quarrel with their sisters as I did, they all enjoy roaming about the woods, hate lessons, and so on. Not even in my happiest moments do my sensations differ from theirs: every boy has experienced that holiday feeling which comes from a brilliant spring morning, and the proud exultation which accompanies the conquest of a hillock.

This is as it should be. The individuality of a child cannot be reproduced, because it is still undefined, embryonic: a potentiality rather than a fact. The child is a mass-being, an undifferentiated sample of *Homo Sapiens*; it is only beginning the process of self-differentiation. Its personality, that

unrepeatable self which distinguishes one human being from all the others, is there, from the moment of birth or even earlier, but the child has not learnt yet how to express it, and so most of its reactions, physical and mental, are identical with those of other human cubs.

In the whole of my childhood I can find but two episodes in which I recognise myself, the man I am now:

at school I make a mistake on purpose to show that I have no ambition, and

I contemplate writing a book on an abstruse subject.

This is real autobiography. The rest is just the story of a boy—any boy—against the background of a specific environment.

I may as well say here that the catastrophe which I have just mentioned left no mark on me. For it was only an event—that is to say something external to me; it did not destroy any creed in me or any system of values, since I had none; it only shook me, and since I was a healthy animal, I soon got over that shock. True, it was about then that I started withdrawing from God: at first my prayers became sulky and resentful, and a little later I rejected God altogether. But, although I cannot prove it, I know that would have happened in any case.

## IN PRUSSIA

ON the main Berlin-Königsberg line, not far from Danzig, there is a little town which in those days (1900) belonged to Prussia and was called Preussisch-Stargard. It was a quiet town, neat and clean. It had a spacious square in the middle, with the church on one side, the long infantry barracks on the other, and the cubic Town Hall between them. In front of the Town Hall there were two lime-trees, and in their shade, two old cabs with two old uniformed cabmen on their seats. How they existed was a mystery, since, in view of the short distances in Stargard, nobody ever hired their vehicles. Perhaps they were antiques kept by some National Museum.

Through the town ran the river Ferse. From the bridge, the favourite place for afternoon walks, one had a pleasant view both to the right, towards Herr Pohlig's goose farm, and to the left, in the direction of the Yacht Club, a squat little building with a huge flag on a tall mast. The water was notoriously too shallow for rowing, let alone racing; yet, after four o'clock in the summer, the Club teemed with sportsmen in flannels and gold-braided caps; they sat at white marble tables and drank beer.

My father had sent me to Stargard because Edgar von Hertzberg, an old friend of his, had a big estate nearby. He met me at the station, found lodgings for me and placed me in the school, the König Friedrich Gymnasium.

I very vividly remember my first day at school.

It began with a Botany lesson. A slovenly old man, fat and sleepy-looking, slouched into the class-room, settled heavily at the desk, and got busy putting his appearance in order. He brushed off the ash which covered the lapels of his shabby, crumpled morning coat, blew his nose noisily, picked his ears with a match, and scratched under his arms. Then with a weary sigh he extracted his note-book and consulted it.

The book gave him no inspiration, so he put it back in his pocket.

"Well, children, what did we do last time?" he asked.

"Roots, Herr Kliesch," answered a voice.

"Oh. Do you remember what I told you about roots?"

"We do, Herr Kliesch." In a chorus, with a great conviction.

"All right then, we'll go on. . . . Oh, Jesus Maria! My bones, my old bones. Getting stiffer and stiffer."

Groaning he got down from the desk, went to the black-board and drew on it a variety of leaves: oval leaves and round ones, with even edges and jagged. He named them all and returned to his desk, the chalk lying thick on the lapels of his coat.

"There," he said, inspecting his work with satisfaction. "Classification is a great thing: science can't exist without it. Now, children, look at these drawings and memorise them, I'll ask you about them in a few minutes. And I'm going to have a little rest, I feel tired to-day."

He took up a comfortable position in his chair, propped his head on his hand, and shut his eyes. The boys did not stir. Silence reigned in the room. A clock could be heard ticking in the corridor; a faint voice droned monotonously across the wall; the flies on the window glass would suddenly raise a fuss and as suddenly grow quiet. Herr Kliesch's head sank lower and lower. Presently an intermittent hissing sound came from his direction.

"Abel." (This in a whisper from the back row.) "Listen, Abel."

"What's it you want?" (Impatiently from somewhere in the middle.)

"Abel, give me half your chocolate, and I'll give you half my sandwich."

"What kind?"

"Dutch cheese. Real Dutch. Fifty pfennig a pound."

"I don't want your cheese"—this with contempt—"you can eat it yourself."

"Listen, Abel, I'll give you the whole sandwich . . ."

"Oh, leave me alone with your sandwich."

Some boys swopped stamps, others chatted in subdued voices, others again had got out some "reading books" and were vicariously sharing the exploits of Red Indian and Teutonic heroes. Herr Kliesch snored on. Next to me the game of Nibs was in progress: with your finger-nail you gave a light flick to the nib; it jumped, and something happened, you either won or lost, I forget which.

Just before the bell, Herr Kliesch stirred in his seat and opened his eyes. Nibs, stamps, and books disappeared from the desks.

"That's funny, very funny," he muttered. "I seem to have dozed off. Old age creeping on, I suppose."

He yawned, rubbed his eyes, and spat into his handkerchief.

"Well, I'm afraid it's too late to start now," he said. "Have you memorised the leaves?"

"We have, Herr Kliesch," answered a joyous chorus. One could already hear the muffled click of the bell as the watchman in the corridor took it down from the shelf. . . .

The following lesson was Latin. An ominous hush preceded it. No one spoke, the boys nervously fingered their grammars, muttering to themselves; the Poles made furtive signs of the cross over their bellies. The tension grew, became unbearable. "*Och, mein lieber Gott*," moaned someone.

Brisk steps resounded in the corridor; the boys jumped up and stood stiffly to attention, their eyes fixed on the door. It was flung open, and Herr Lindner, a short thick-set man with a red swollen face, narrow eyes, and hair *en brosse*, burst into the room, throwing out a sonorous: "Good morning, children."

"Good morning, Herr Lindner."

In two strides he reached the desk.

"Sit down! We begin! Fifth declension!" he rapped out in tones of military command. "We'll start with . . . with Pavlizki. Pavlizki, the word *Dies*, please."

Pavlizki jumped up as if stung from behind and took in as much breath as he could.

"Nominative *Dies*, Genitive *Diei*, Dative. . . ."

He got as far as Ablative and dried up. Herr Lindner leant forward across the desk, his lips compressed, his narrow eyes screwed up.

"Well! Ablative?" Sharp as a gimlet, his look bored into Pavlizki's very soul. Pavlizki gulped, blinked, twiddled his fingers, but the ablative would not come to him.

"Is it possible that you don't know it?" queried Herr Lindner with sarcastic incredulity. "No, I can't believe that. I'm sure you know it very well, only you wish to tease us a little, don't you?"

Pavlizki moved his lips but said nothing.

"Or perhaps you've forgotten it?" asked Herr Lindner, passing to a tone of sinister sweetness. "Have you? . . . Have you, you Polish cow?" he thundered as the boy did not answer.

"Yes, Herr Lindner, I have."

"Ah, you've forgotten! Then I'll remind you!"

With leonine agility he sprang down from his desk, rushed to Pavlizki, jammed the boy's cheek between the fingers of his left hand, and with the right started hitting out at the other cheek.

"Don't forget, you ass! Learn the declensions! First declension" (bang). "Second" (bang). "Third" (bang). . . .

The blows cracked dryly in the dead stillness of the class. Pavlizki blinked, jerked his head and whimpered feebly, his cheek rapidly assuming the colour of boiled beetroot. At length Herr Lindner released him.

"Idiot! *Schweinehund!*" he muttered hoarsely. "I'll make you learn, I'll break your obstinacy. . . . Change places!"

This meant that Pavlizki, who had been sitting in the middle, was to take the last place, right under the master's desk, while those below Pavlizki all moved one place up, away from the master. The manœuvre, although it entailed transferring the contents of a dozen desks, was executed with a speed and precision indicative of a thorough training.

"We continue," announced Herr Lindner. "The word *Fructus!* . . . Massmann!"

Massmann got safely through the singular but made a mistake in the plural.

"It's terrible! It's impossible!" groaned Herr Lindner, and the scene of the assault was repeated, with the difference that Massmann burst out howling. This was a wrong departure: all the manliness in Herr Lindner was aroused, the speed and vigour of the blows increased to a maximum.

"Be a man!" (bang). "And not a sloppy girl!" (bang). "And not a baby!" (bang). "And remember: *Fructus* . . ."

Half the boys were beaten in the same manner. If one of them answered correctly Herr Lindner would keep at him until he made a mistake. Not even Lietke, the first pupil, a flaxen-haired, good-looking boy, escaped punishment: Herr Lindner tripped him up on some insidious exception.

"It's terrible! Disgusting!" he panted. "None of you want to learn. Idiots! *Schafsköpfe!* . . . Von Gubsky."

His voice lost its fierceness, it was quiet, almost gentle.

"You must feel rather new here, von Gubsky. Besides, I understand from Herr von Hertzberg that in Russia you have a different method of teaching. So I won't be strict with you, not at first. Don't hurry, take your time. The word *Fructus*, please."

He tried me with several declensions, I knew them all; as a matter of fact, I was in advance of the form. He beamed.

"*Famos!* Splendid!" he said, with something like kindness gleaming in his narrow eyes. "Thank you, von Gubsky, I'll give you One Plus." (One was the highest mark.) "Take your things and move to the first place. And you, Lietke, you booby, you ought to be ashamed of yourself." . . .

Latin was followed by the long break. The boys rushed out into the courtyard and walked about in groups, their arms round each other's shoulders. Feeling very lonely, I went to a corner and unwrapped my sandwich. It contained the so-called Blood Sausage which I could not eat, so I threw it over the fence. A group of boys, headed by Lietke, came up to me and stopped.

"Sneak!" said Lietke. "Licking Lindner's boots! Filthy Cossack! All Cossacks are thieves and cowards!"

His companions giggled gleefully. I tried to look un-

concerned, but my heart sank, for I knew there would be a scrap, and I hated fighting.

"Look at his cap, folks!" continued Lietke. "The fool doesn't even know that caps aren't allowed in the courtyard. Take it off, you fool!"

I said nothing, but pushed the cap deeper over my eyes.

"Take it off, I tell you!" he shouted, raising his arm to knock it off.

Moved by misery rather than courage, I pushed him in the chest, with the result that he sprawled on the ground. "A-ah," gasped the audience.

Lietke rose. His face was dark, there was murder in his eyes.

"You dare, do you?" he hissed. "Well, you'll regret it. I'll show you who's the strongest in the form. Just you wait."

Scowling ferociously, he turned up his sleeves. Then, crouching, he came to within a striking distance.

"Come on, come on!" he hissed, sawing the air with his arms. "Ah, you're afraid, I see! Now dare to touch me, and see what happens to you. Bootlicker! Filthy Cossack! Here I am, why don't you touch me?"

Instinct told me what to do. I put my cap at a jaunty angle.

"You are too weak for me," I said, turned and went my way.

"Coward!" he yelled after me. But he had lost the game: before the break was over, the whole Sexta knew that I was the Strongest in the Form. And that was that; never was that verdict questioned, never did anyone challenge my title. Not even Lietke; he ungrudgingly accepted his defeat, became my second in command, and loyally kept that post to the end.

I lodged with the Dierfelds, a young, newly-married couple. The husband, a tall man with undulating raven-black hair and a long wavy moustache, looked like a southern impresario, but was in point of fact a clerk at the local Excise Office. For convenience' sake I was to call him Uncle



Paul, and his wife Aunt Mieka. She was a pretty woman, soft all over, with dimples in both cheeks and a look of perpetual benevolence in her eyes.

At eight in the morning there was breakfast: coffee—very milky—bread and butter. Aunt Mieka beamed gently from behind the coffee-pot, Uncle Paul read the local newspaper and commented upon the news. Then he got up and prodded me encouragingly in the ribs. "To work, young fellow, to work!" he said, and we went out, he to his office, I to school.

Punctually at five past twelve he was back to dinner. He buoyantly kissed Aunt Mieka, patted me on the shoulder and emitted a happy: Aah! at the sight of the dish.

"Ah, cutlets! I love them! Now don't be minging, Mieka dear, give your hubby one more. And some more potato. I'm terribly hungry to-day." Then, turning to me: "Do you like cutlets, young fellow?"

"I do."

"That's good. Nothing like simple food. *Mens sana in corpore sano.*" (Pronouncing in the German way: *zana* and *zano.*)

The food at the Dierfelds' was certainly simple and may have been healthy, but it tasted very bad. The soups, especially, were atrocious—thick and gluey, with a lot of cornflour; whatever their consistency, they always smelt of the laundry. One of them, served on Sundays, was particularly revolting. It camouflaged itself as chocolate soup, it smelt of chocolate, was of chocolate colour, and to complete the deception, had the beaten white of an egg on top, the so-called Floating Islands which one associates with sweets. When this soup appeared for the first time I took a big spoonful of it—and choked. It was beer, mulled beer!

"What's the matter, my boy? Don't you like it?" Aunt Mieka enquired solicitously.

"Not very much," said I, stuffing huge lumps of bread into my mouth.

"You *are* funny!" said Uncle Paul. "Do you mean to say you don't have *Biersuppe* in Russia? What do you eat then?"

At six there was supper: cold meat and potatoes, mountains

of potatoes. After supper we crossed over to the drawing-room; Uncle Paul lit a long smelly cigar and philosophised. He did it every evening, it must have been a digestive exercise with him.

"Life is a serious thing. You get nothing free of charge, you have to pay for everything. But life is just: an honest worker always gets his due. . . . Don't you think so, Mieka?"

Mieka thought so. She always agreed with him.

"Yes, work is the main thing," he continued. "But, of course, one needn't run away from pleasure. Flirting with the girls, for instance, eh?" This with a sly wink in my direction. "I'm sure you are a great flirt, young fellow, aren't you? That's good, go on flirting: it keeps one young and elevates the soul. But take care: girls are dangerous folk, very dangerous."

And with great feeling, but out of tune, he would hum:

"My heart is like a beehive,  
The girls are bees within;  
They come and go and cheer me  
With merry buzz and din."

Wherever you went in Stargard you heard that tune. It was performed by the Fire Brigade every Sunday and played on every piano in the town; middle-aged men hummed it on the way home from the office or in the *Bierhalle*; flappers sang it in fragile glassy voices; boys yelled it in the streets, turning it into an aggressive quick march.

Moved by the lyrical power of the song, Uncle Paul would nestle closer to Mieka, put his arm round her waist and, looking at her in a special way, would say things that made her blush and cry: "For shame, Paulchen, you mustn't." I did not understand what he was saying, but I used to feel embarrassed too, and go to my attic to attend to my stamp album.

No doubt Stargard was, and still is, a somnolent dismal hole of a place, but for us twelve-year-old boys it was full of attractions. There were the woods behind the Shooting Club, where we played Red Indians, myself, as the Strongest in the

Form, assuming the part of the great Chingachgook, with Lietke acting as my beloved son Uncas; the enemy—the Siouzes, the Blackheads and other rabble—were conscripted more or less forcibly from among the weaker boys. We played ball on the town square, a game which derived its thrill from the fact that it was forbidden and could only be indulged in when Mehler, the policeman, had gone home for supper. Or we would give a shop window a strong upward rub with the thumb; the vibrating glass produced an alarming rumble within, the shopkeeper rushed out into the street, and it was great fun to see his fury and hear him swear. Or again, we walked behind the school-girls, imitating their mannerisms and their thin voices until they turned on us: "Get away, you nasty boys!" But the noblest pastime was to wage war with the traditional enemy of the Gymnasium, the boys of the Municipal school, called Poodles. It was entirely a war of expletives.

"Hey, Poodles, don't make puddles!"

"Be quiet, you *Schweinehunde*, or we'll wring your necks!"

"You just try!"

"All right, come on!"

Arms and weapons of all sorts were brandished—leather straps, sticks, knives; both camps in turn advanced and retreated, uttering bloodcurdling threats, but somehow it never came to a fight, and the adversaries, having exhausted their vocabulary, would go their ways, contemptuously spitting over their shoulders. *Furor Teutonicus*. . . .

Adult militarism was represented by a battalion of the 36th Infantry Regiment. Towards the evening there would appear in the neighbourhood of the bridge a couple of lieutenants, a fascinating combination of stony faces, high collars, wasp waists, yellow buttons and dangerous-looking swords. The girls eyed them with adoration, the boys with respect, the grown-ups with pride. One day, however, their glory was eclipsed; that was when a Lieutenant of the Death's Head Hussars appeared in the town. He had come to visit his aunt, the ancient Frau Siegel in the Memel Gasse. He stayed

with her from three till five, during which time a considerable crowd collected before the house. That crowd accompanied him back to the station; now and again a boy would push forward, outstrip the lieutenant, and walk backwards so as to enjoy to the full the sight of the Skull and Cross-Bones on the cap. "I wish I could be a Hussar," said Lietke with a sigh. "But it's so expensive."

One day Lietke took me behind the barracks where the drill-ground was. A high wooden fence ran round the place, but he had discovered two knots in the boards which could be knocked out. We looked through the holes. At first there was nothing particular to see: an officer stood in the middle of the square and yawned while a squad of men did the goose-step: '*Links . . . Links . . . Links.*' Then the officer left and the instruction was continued by the sergeant, a short blond gorilla with a wart on the tip of his nose. The squad being close to our holes we could hear every word.

"Look lively, you herd of pigs!" he yelled. "Heads up! No breathing in the ranks! Heads up, I said!"

He rushed to one of the men, an undersized, stupid-looking youth, and hit him on the chin. The youth tumbled back and stood blinking.

"Back into the ranks, you animal! Back, I tell you! Don't you hear me, you bloody Pole?"

He struck again. The Pole clutched at his mouth, letting the rifle drop to the ground.

"Pick up your rifle! Pick it up!"

The youth did not move: he was too terrified to understand anything.

"Disobedience?" roared the gorilla. "Disobeying me? Me?"

A hail of blows descended on the youth, who swayed and jerked like a doll that was being shaken. The sight was too much for me, I tore myself away from the fence. Lietke still stood glued to the hole.

"Oh Lord, oh Lord!" he muttered in hysterical excitement. "Now he's hit him on the mouth . . . he's fallen . . . they're lifting him . . ."

Then he too left the fence. His face was quite pale; each of us was frightened by what he saw in the other's eyes. "Let's go somewhere," I suggested, and we ran.

"They shouldn't allow that sort of thing," I said after a while. "It's beastly."

Lietke agreed with me, almost but not quite.

"Yes, it's beastly, but in some cases it may be necessary," he said. "Specially with the Poles. They hate us Germans, and they play all sorts of tricks on us."

I asked him what tricks, but he could not tell me. "All sorts of tricks," he repeated. "Besides, you can't be sloppy in the army, for after all it's a question of defending the Fatherland."

I was the only boy in the Sexta whom Herr Lindner never touched. Even when I made a mistake he remained friendly; he only grew confused a little as though ashamed of my ignorance. Be it said to his credit that I was doing very well: I was first in all subjects.

One day he invited me to a cup of coffee at his place. The boys simply would not believe me when they heard about it, and on the appointed afternoon a group of them went with me. They stopped some distance before Lindner's house and from behind the corner watched me ring the bell and disappear inside.

The host was most amiable. He gave me cakes and coffee with cream—quite a different proposition from the Dierfelds's beverage. He questioned me on Russia: he wanted to know whether tallow candles were actually the staple food of the Cossacks; whether bears roamed freely about the streets of Moscow; whether Russia had a proper army, with guns and rifles; and so forth.\*

\* Authentic: I remember all the details of this year with an extraordinary clearness. The sceptics are referred to: 1. Lloyd George's statement about "General Kharkoff." 2. The girl student of the University of Durham who thought that Red Russians were ginger-haired Russians. 3. The solicitor who said to my wife *à propos* of her former estate: "Of course, your father had the right of life and death over your peasants, hadn't he?" 4. Mrs. X, who on returning from a conducted tour to Russia assured me that there had been no bookshops in Russia before the Revolution (I believe she has written a book on Russia). And 5. Any Hollywood film of Russian life.

"Oh yes, we have an army," I said, "and it's bigger than yours. And we have any amount of guns. In Petersburg, when the artillery is passing, you have to wait for hours before you can cross the street."

"Tsss!" Herr Lindner drew in his breath through his teeth. "Fancy that! But then I understand your roads are bad and the people illiterate. Of course, we know very little about Russia; only a few of us have been as far as Poland."

I made the best of this reservation.

"Poland is the poorest part of Russia," I said. "You ought to see Petersburg." And I drew a picture of a fairy-tale city chock-full of marble palaces, Pushkin monuments and gigantic bridges over the Neva.

He also wanted to know whether my father always lived in Petersburg. Now, I had realised by that time that my prestige with Herr Lindner was due to my father being an Excellency, a title common enough in Russia but rare in Germany.

"He has to," I said simply. "The Tsar is in Petersburg, and father has to go often to the Court. When he goes he always brings us some toffees, in gold paper, with big eagles on it. They are delicious, you can't get anything like it in any shop."

"And what post does Herr von Gubsky occupy?"

That I did not know, but I said the post was very high, something to do with various ministries.

"Like our *Reichsrat*, perhaps?" suggested Lindner.

"Yes, I suppose so."

He was very pleased. He made me eat cakes till I felt sick and he complained about his job.

"I'm wasting my time here in Stargard," he said. "The boys are just savages, all except you, of course. They don't want to learn; Latin means nothing to them, absolutely nothing! It's really heart-breaking!"

"It must be," I said, stifling a hiccup.

On the first of September—anniversary of Sedan—the whole school went for an excursion: the Prima, the top

form, in front; then the Secunda, and so on, in double file.

After an hour's walk we came to a lake with a café. The bigger boys sat down at the tables and demanded beer, a liberty granted to them for that day; the younger ones had coffee and scattered about the woods.

The sound of a horn called them back. Herr Direktor had arrived and was standing on the steps of the café with the masters grouped behind him. When all were assembled he made a speech. It was a pompous speech. The boys, he said, were not merely pupils of the Gymnasium but also subjects of a mighty Empire who would in due time be called upon to strengthen the fortress of the German Kultur. To be worthy of that task they must study hard, always bearing in mind that he, their Director, and his staff were day and night thinking of their welfare. Herr Kliesch scratched himself; Herr Lindner threw out his chest and glowered down at the Sexta. The speech ended with a *Hoch!* for the Kaiser.

There was another speech by a very fat, important-looking man, and we shouted *Hoch!* again. The Director stepped forward once more.

"Amongst you," he said, "there is a representative of a country which is connected with ours by ties of warm friendship and has shared the laurels of our glorious victory over the perfidious Chinese. I am sure Russia will always be ready to fight on our side against the Yellow Peril—in *gleichem Schritt und Tritt*, as the poet says. *Russland, hoch!*"

He departed and the feast proper began. The senior boys turned their mugs on the table in a special manner, as is done by the undergraduates, uttering some nonsensical Latin invocations. The juniors stood by in the hope of getting an illegal treat; those successful licked their lips and swelled with pride. A group of Primaners took charge of me.

"Drink, Russian! This is the day when the French (*Franzosen ohne Hosen*) learnt the might of the German fist. *Deutschland, hoch!*"

I drank. I disliked beer, but the elation of double patriotism made it taste almost pleasant.

"We'll thrash the French again, they're getting too cheeky,"

continued the Primaners. "You Russians fought them too in 1813, so you must hate them as we do. Drink!"

I drank. A fog spread in my head, my tongue became miraculously free. Jumping upon a chair I swore that Russia had always loved Germany and was her best friend, huraaaah!

They threw me up in the air, and at first it was amusing, but once down on my legs I felt all wrong. A tall red-faced boy was pushing a mug of beer into my hands. "No, please not," I begged, and all of a sudden made a rush for the bushes. They laughed.

At dusk we went back. I remember a long file of blue caps in front of me; it swayed and sang, and then it would vanish and I would find myself by the ditch propping up a tree which threatened to fall on me. "Mind the tree!" I would yell. Then darkness descended, we reached the town, and when I started yelling, the others would pull me by the sleeve and tell me to shut up. Later still I was in a hall. It was like a hall I knew in Petersburg, so I shouted in Russian: "Who is there?" to which a voice from above answered in German, for some reason: "*Na, komm mal herauf, Junge,*" and a man helped me up a narrow chimney with banisters on one side. "You're Uncle Paul, I know your moustache," I said, and he laughed stupidly.

I got into bed, which proved a very unsafe place to be in. At times the ceiling descended so low that I suffocated; or else the bed would go up in the air and, after remaining in suspense for a while, swoop down again, producing a horrid emptiness about the heart. I wanted to get up, but a tree was lying on my chest, my arms were as weak as grass, whilst in my mind an endless procession of mugs was passing, tall, singing mugs with a thick, brown, smelly liquid in them. All I could manage was to lean over the edge of the bed.

I have never tasted beer since.

The autumn vacations began, known by the poetical name of Potato Vacations (*Kartoffelferien*). A yellow wagonette conveyed me to Neudorf Castle, the estate of Edgar von Hertzberg.



The castle looked like a glorified barracks from outside, and was depressing inside on account of its narrow windows, dark ceilings of carved oak, old dark portraits, coats of arms, tapestries and knights in black armour. Edgar was a man of sixty, very tall, white-haired, with tired faded eyes. A veteran of 1870, he held himself as stiff as a ramrod and spoke in short abrupt sentences. His wife, a timid little woman with a nervous smile, was mostly ill and seldom came down. There were two daughters, Wilma and Kate, both fat, ugly, and sullen. They hated me from the outset, and I heartily reciprocated.

"Daddy," said Kate one day at dinner. "He climbed the pear-tree to-day. I told him not to, but he put his tongue out at me."

"Is this true?" Edgar asked me.

I had to confess it was.

"Don't do it again."

No more was said about it, and the rest of the dinner passed as usual in dead silence. Then the old man went to his study; the sisters and I stayed behind.

"He caught it this time," said Kate with wicked glee to her sister. "The nasty boy! I'm sure he's just a street-boy and has no right to use *Von*."

"It's better to be a street-boy than a spy," I observed into space.

Kate turned on me.

"You dare to call me a spy? Say you're sorry or Wilma will thrash you."

"I'm not afraid of cows."

The shot went home. Without uttering a sound Wilma made a rush at me and tried to catch me by the hair. I ducked and dealt her a blow in the ribs. Kate attacked me from the other side; I gave her a push; she fell and started screaming. Wilma bent over her, the butler appeared in the doorway and with a pleased grin surveyed the scene. I hastened out. . . .

But Neudorf had its redeeming feature in the form of an enormous park which gradually merged into a marshy thicket with a pond in the middle. In that park I spent whole

days exploring the accesses to the pond—and very muddy they were—stealing carrots and raspberries from the kitchen garden, catching lizards and butterflies in the dry clearings. With my air-gun I shot at bottles, sparrows, fir-cones, and, when Fritz, the gardener, was out of the way, at hothouse panes. There was also the pig-run behind the stables. If you hit a pig at a range of twenty yards—a distance at which the slug can do no serious harm—it emits a piercing squeal and starts galloping round the run; other pigs gallop after it, and thus you get a lively sight and any amount of moving targets, each further hit being registered by a new outburst of squealing.

Once, as I was taking aim at a fat porker which was voluptuously rubbing its back against a post, I felt a hand on my shoulder.

"Give me the gun," said Edgar. "You'll have it back when you leave."

The worst of it was that the sisters found out, and at supper talked all the time about pigs, casting malicious glances at me.

With every day Neudorf became duller and duller. The weather broke, it started raining, and all one could do was to sit in the dark library, look at the silly coat of arms and read sloppy stories.

Then one morning an unusual activity was noticeable in the house. The maids were polishing the parquet and dusting the mirrors; old silver plates were taken out of the cupboard; over the front door Fritz was fixing a decoration of fir branches which was meant to be some kind of monogram but looked like a loose knot. Across the farmyard the workmen were carrying bedsteads and mattresses from one outhouse to another.

"Billeting," Fritz explained to me. "The manœuvres are on, and Herr von Hertzberg is taking in three officers and a squad of men for the night. They say Herr von Krausen, the Herr Major himself, is coming."

The officers arrived towards the evening. Edgar was in his tail-coat, his wife in a dress with a train over which she

stumbled continually. The girls, both in fluffy white, looked fatter and uglier than ever.

The Major proved to be a purple-faced man with bulging eyes and a head that grew straight from the shoulders without the intermediary of a neck. Next to him, two wasp-waisted lieutenants were screwing up their moustaches.

I was introduced as the son of a Russian statesman.

"Russian, ekhhh?" A sound of water boiling in a kettle issued from the Major's throat. "How d'you like Germany, ekh? Better than Russia?"

"No, not better," I said, hating the man.

"A patriot, I see, ekhhhh. And what are you going to be when you grow up? An officer?"

I stared at his double chin, and kept obstinately silent. A frightened glance appeared in the old lady's eyes, but fortunately at that moment supper was announced.

The supper went on endlessly. The Major talked about the manœuvres all the time. When champagne appeared Edgar got up and made a short clumsy speech: "Have the honour—high military profession—our beloved Kaiser." Then the officers proposed the health of the host, the hostess, and the girls. Wilma and Kate flushed and looked down, their faces turning into crimson cubes. Later on, in the blue salon, one of the lieutenants ventured to address Wilma.

"The country is very nice here, isn't it?" he said.

"Yes," whispered Wilma, stirring on her seat and gulping.

"Do you stay here all the summer?"

"Yes." She grinned. Her grin crept higher and higher, it reached her ears and threatened to go beyond the ears. The sight was more than I could bear, so I slipped out into the park.

By the front door Fritz was smoking.

"Good evening, sir," he said. "Come out for a bit of fresh air? Yes, that's better than sitting in stuffy rooms."

His friendly manner, his simple words, and his round jovial face contrasted so pleasantly with the stiff company in the house that my heart went out to him. I came down the steps, so as to feel him closer to myself.

"Have you finished working for to-day?" I asked.

"Yes, sir, I have. It was a hard day. But everything went all right. The men had a fine supper and are going to bed now. And how are the *Herren Offiziere*? Did they enjoy their supper?"

"I suppose so. Why shouldn't they?"

"Oh," he said meaningly. "The *Herren Offiziere* know what's what. They're used to grand receptions. Especially the Herr Major."

"But why? Major isn't such a high rank. In Petersburg a lieutenant-general came to dine with us, and nobody made a fuss about him. And also an admiral, with two eagles on his straps."

"Well, I don't know about Russia," said Fritz, judicially, "but in our country a major is something big. Mind you, he commands a battalion, and that's a responsible job which is given only to the best officers. Like Herr von Krausen"—he nodded towards the castle. "He's a fine man, Herr von Krausen is, and no mistake."

My friendly feeling towards Fritz waned for some reason, giving room to a vague resentment. I did not want to talk to him any more, so I went up to my room and lay down on the bed. Nostalgia seized me. As clearly as though they were actually before me, I saw the faces of the people I had left in Russia, and in contrast to them the old Hertzbergs, their horrid daughters, and the wooden officers seemed so alien and inhuman that I sat up and in impotent fury shook my fist at the floor.

The winter was very cold: it froze for weeks on end, and as most of us boys had no overcoats, loitering about the town was out of the question—we had to stay indoors. Life became very dull. I pinched a few lovely stamps from Lietke and had no qualms about it, since I suspected him of having spirited away my precious blue Newfoundland. Getting up in the morning was a torture; the water in the basin was covered with a sheet of ice, so I did not wash but just gave my nose a rub with the towel. When *Biersuppe* was served I looked the other way.

Pavlizki tried to cross the river too early, the ice broke and he was drowned. At his funeral the priest officiated in Latin, which nobody could understand, and Herr Lindner simulated grief, which made him look exactly like a pig.

As before, Uncle Paul philosophised, threw out his invigorating mottoes, and mauled Mieka about—obscenely, it seemed to me. As before, Mieka smiled benevolently in the process of distributing the everlasting potatoes. Day after day the same masters entered the class to drone about the same things. Lindner raged with unabated fury, Kliesch dozed and snored. My only solace was Lietke. We spent most of the evenings together comparing our stamp collections, helping each other with lessons, chatting, and longing for the spring to come.

One day in April the town was thrilled by the appearance of a poster announcing the visit of the Danzig Dramatic troupe. They were to perform *The Spy*, a drama of the Franco-Prussian war. The prices of the seats ranged from fifteen pfennig to two marks, and at the bottom of the poster the Governor of the Province certified that the play had been approved in conformity to para. 134 of D.T.S.N.V. An. 1887. "Must be fine stuff," said Lietke.

The performance took place in the hangar of the fire brigade, decorated for that occasion with black-white-and-red flags. It was alleged that the actors impersonating the French officers would wear real French trousers; accordingly, when the curtain rose revealing a red-trousered and heavily moustachioed man on the stage, a wave of excited whispering passed over the back rows. "Yes, they're real," said Lietke with conviction.

The drama was conceived on straightforward lines. Shortly before the war a cunning Frenchman wins the confidence of a brave German colonel and the love of his chaste if lisping daughter. They become engaged. One night the Frenchman penetrates into the colonel's study and steals a bundle of important documents. "*La patrie est sauvée!*" he exclaims with an atrocious accent, and is about to climb out of the window

when the girl appears on the threshold and after a high-flown speech shoots him through the heart. The colonel rushes in, catches the swooning girl in his arms and says: "I'm proud of you. You've set a high example to all future brides and mothers of the Fatherland!" At this juncture the audience burst into a tremendous hurrah, while behind the scene an orchestra of three instruments struck the *Wacht am Rhein*.

The play made a terrific impression on me, perhaps because it was the first I had seen in my life. Also by then I had become infected with that hatred of the French which lived in the bosom of every good Stargarder.

"Germany is a great country," I said to Lietke as we left the theatre. "As great as Russia."

"I'm glad you think so," said he, "and I thank you for it from all my heart."

We shook hands solemnly. It was one of those spring nights when the irritation produced by the brilliant moon and the smell of budding poplars drives all thought of sleep away. We went to the Ferse bridge and leaned over the parapet. The colossal flag of the little yacht club flapped lightly in the breeze; the geese were babbling in Herr Pohlig's farm; in the moonshine the meadows looked like snowfields.

"We two are real friends," said Lietke. "And real friendship is a rare thing."

I agreed with him. There was a pause.

"But love is greater than friendship," he continued. "You know, I'd like to fall in love so completely as to die of it."

"Why die?"

"Because . . . I can't explain, but that's how I feel. What is life after all? We eat, we sleep, we run about and swot, what's the sense of it? None. But if you love, then it's quite different."

"Have you ever been in love?"

Lietke hesitated. A frank No would somehow be out of tune with the moment; to say Yes would be a lie.

"Don't ask me about it," he replied mysteriously. "It's painful to remember. . . . But now I'll soon be in love."

"With whom?"

"You won't talk?"

"No."

"Word of honour?"

"Word of honour."

"With Kamilla. You know her, she lives in your house, the second entrance."

Yes, I knew Kamilla. I had played ball with her once on our yard. The ball had hit her in the eye, she had cried, which made her nose red in a second, and she had sulked at me ever since.

"She's a nice-looking girl," I said.

"She's a beauty," Lietke corrected me. "And her people are rich. I know that her father has just bought the brick works on the Pelplin Road!"

"You mustn't think of money when it's a question of love," I remarked.

"Why not? I love her for herself, but if she happens to have some money, so much the better. Isn't it so?"

"Yes, perhaps. . . . Have you flirted with her already?"

"No. But I shall this Sunday. Of course, I shan't show her that I love her because girls despise you if you do. I'll tell her right out that I can never love anyone."

Next Sunday he appeared on the asphalt yard and started walking to and fro with his hands in his pockets, whistling the Beehive melody so loudly that the cook on the ground floor swore at him in *Plattdeutsch* and shut the window with a bang. After a while Kamilla came down with a big ball which she threw up and caught and threw up again. Lietke saluted her smartly and resumed his pacing as if she were not there. At length, having impressed her with his indifference, he approached her and offered her a bar of chocolate. She beamed and took it. He said something to her, and they went out into the street.

And then my father arrived unexpectedly to fetch me back to Russia. He was staying at Neudorf, and I too was to spend a few days there prior to our departure. I packed my things and went round to say good-bye.

"Remember, I'm your friend for ever," said Lietke. "If you ever need help you've only to call me and I'll come and stand by you. *In gleichem Schritt und Tritt*, as the poet says."

I had thought of leaving him my air-gun as a parting present, but something in his manner of speech cooled my feelings, so I decided to give him my knife instead. It was a good knife with five blades; and anyhow, what could he do with an air-gun in the town?

At the Dierfelds' there were coffee and a multicoloured *Elisabettorte*. Uncle Paul was very fussy.

"Well, young fellow, the best of luck to you," he said when the moment came to leave. "Never be lazy, always be honest, that's the best advice Paul Dierfeld can give you. Mieka and I have both grown to love you, and"—his moustache twisted oddly—"we're sorry to let you go."

I embraced him, trying not to cry.

"Good-bye, my boy," said Aunt Mieka. "Be a good son to your parents and don't forget us. And here's something for you." She gave me a block of *Pfefferkuchen* tied with a pink ribbon.

At the door the yellow wagonette from Neudorf was waiting. I got in, the coachman shook the reins, and we were about to drive off when Uncle Paul stepped forward.

"I might as well see you off to the end of the town," he said, climbing in. "Our last chat; we may never meet again. But d'you know what? Why not ask your father to send you here next summer? That would be great. We would go to Danzig one day and have a proper spree, like two bachelors, eh?"

We were emerging into the square when he seized his head and burst out laughing.

"*Donnerwetter!* I've come out without my hat! *Donner und Doria!* that's never happened to me before! Well, it can't be helped, I must go back. Good-bye, young fellow." And he jumped off.

Neudorf was quite different this time. The rooms seemed lighter, Edgar had turned into an amiable old man, the



daughters did not matter in the least, and only a few days off there were Petersburg, my mother, my room with the lovely new desk, and my friends into whose envious ears I would pour the tale of my adventures in foreign lands.

On the eve of the departure, after lunch, there were visitors, the family of Wilhelm von Hertzberg, of Borkau, an estate a few miles from Neudorf. I was introduced to Leni, a slender girl of my age. She was very pretty, prettier even than Zina, and I felt shy. I stepped behind Father and did not know what to do.

"Remember your manners," he said to me in Russian. "She's your guest here, go and take her into the park."

I went with her, picking up my air-gun on the way. As soon as we were by ourselves my shyness passed. (I am always at my best *à deux*.)

"What do you shoot?" she asked.

"Oh, anything," I said. "Mostly sparrows. Shall I show you?"

But she did not like the idea, so we went to the hothouse where I had my targets lined up: bottles and tins. I had counted on impressing her with my skill, and was disappointed to discover that she was almost as good a shot as myself. "Only you mustn't screw up your face when you take aim," I said. "That doesn't help you."

We visited the kitchen garden and ate some unripe pears. I took her to the pond, choosing the most difficult path, where one had to jump over puddles and walk along fallen trees. Then we climbed my favourite lime-tree and stayed there till the gong sounded for supper. I hated going back to people, and so did Leni.

Supper over, we went up to the first floor and sat down at the bottom of the spiral staircase which led to the tower. Before us stretched a long dimly-lit corridor with bedrooms on either side. We spoke in a whisper, although there was no one to hear us, and when I looked at her thin little face with a curl falling over the forehead I felt wonderfully happy, I did not know why.

"The last bedroom on the right is Wilma's," I said. "We

had a fight one day, and I gave her a good thrashing, although she's twice as big as I am. But she was stupid, she went for my hair, and it's too short to catch."

"Boys shouldn't fight girls," said Leni.

"But she attacked me first. I couldn't very well run away, could I? Oh, she's a nasty thing! Do you like her?"

"No, I don't. She's wicked!"

"She is. Now you, I think, are very good."

"I? Oh no, I'm not." She shook her head; as she did so the blue ribbon in her hair got loose and wobbled. "You don't know me; I'm wicked too."

"In what way?"

"In all sorts of ways. For instance"—she leaned closer to me so that her shoulder touched mine—"on Monday cook said that our cat had just had kittens, so I wanted to run over to the barn and see, but it was the time of my lesson and Fräulein Fielke, our governess, wouldn't let me. I got so furious then that I pinched her. That was wicked, wasn't it?"

Pinching, of course, was bad form, but . . . "What is Fräulein Fielke like?" I asked.

"You know her, she's the one who sat on Wilma's left at supper."

"That one? Thin and with lips all turned in? Oh, you may pinch her all right."

"How can you say that!" cried Leni indignantly. "She's very good, frightfully good."

"She can't be good with a face like that."

"Her face has nothing to do with it. I tell you she's good. And mummy says so, too. So there."

"Your mummy is the lady who sat next to Uncle Edgar? She's very beautiful, I think."

"Yes, very," said Leni with conviction.

"She's like you, you know."

"Like me? What nonsense!" She laughed gaily. "You *are* talking nonsense."

From below came the sounds of muffled conversation and the clatter of dishes in the dining-room, where the servants

were clearing the table. Someone started playing a waltz.

"What is your Borkau like?" I asked.

"Oh, Borkau is wonderful!" cried Leni fervently. "There's nothing in the world like Borkau. You know"—she put her fingers on my hand—"this summer father thought of taking us to Zoppot, the seaside place, and we were quite miserable, because we didn't want to leave Borkau. And Elli said nothing would make her go, she would simply lie down on the floor and kick. It's because she doesn't want to part with Blitz."

"Who is Blitz?"

"He's her horse, her very own. Elli is only fifteen, but she's a marvellous rider; she breaks in young horses. . . . And then there's Vera, she's the eldest and always makes us laugh. And we have a park as big as the one here . . ."

She talked about their park, the Spanish cherries they had, their dog with the odd name of Cognac ("because Vera made him drunk one day"). I looked at her profile and I had a feeling as though I had known her for ages and ages.

"Leni!" called a voice from downstairs. "Where are you, Leni?"

"It's Fräulein," she whispered.

"Don't mind her," said I. "Go on about Borkau. Who else is there?"

"There is Kurt, my brother. Vera always teases him because he's so slow and clumsy, but he's very nice really and a genius."

"How do you mean, 'genius'?"

"I mean he plays the piano by himself; it's called improvisation. . . . What a pity you've never been to Borkau."

"Yes, it's a pity," I said, and suddenly felt very sad. Why had they not told me before about that wonderful Borkau? I might have spent my holidays there, with Leni, Kurt, Elli and Vera, instead of eating my heart out at that awful Neudorf.

"Couldn't you come to Borkau now?" asked Leni. "We have plenty of room there."

"I can't, I'm going to Russia to-morrow." But Russia did not attract me any more.

"Leni, we're leaving! Come along!" cried Fräulein Fielke from below.

"So soon?" drawled Leni with disappointment. "I don't want to go yet."

"Then don't go. Let's hide somewhere."

"No, I must." She got up, and stood brushing her frock down.

"Wait a second, only a second," I begged. "Tell me a little more about Borkau. You said Vera made you laugh. What does she do?"

Leni was torn between pleasure and duty.

"All sorts of things," she said. "She's frightfully clever at imitating people. For instance, she does something to her face and then she looks exactly like Wilma. Or she shows how Kurt eats cherries; he can eat tons of them. And sometimes she plays whole scenes, nonsense scenes, you know . . ."

She was just getting into her stride when there were renewed shouts, a chorus of shouts, coming from the hall.

"Oh, they're going!" she cried anxiously. "Come along. Quick!"

I remained sitting and turned my head away from her.

"Aren't you coming down?" she asked in surprise.

"No, you go alone," I answered sulkily.

"Why won't you? Are you angry?" She bent lower, trying to see my face, but I turned it still further away to the wall. "You *are* funny," she said in bewilderment. "So you're going to stay here and not say good-bye to anybody?"

"Yes."

"Well then, I must go. Come to Borkau next time." She lightly touched my arm and ran towards the staircase, shouting: "I'm coming, I'm coming!"

Downstairs the animated hum of voices moved from the hall on to the porch, farewell shouts were exchanged, the gravel crunched under the wheels of the departing carriages. Then the front door was shut, Edgar and my father passed to the study, and all of a sudden the house grew quiet. I went on sitting gloomily where I was. A little later the two sisters came up and stopped in the middle of the corridor talking in subdued voices. I only caught their last words. "Have they got less money than we have?" asked Kate, and Wilma said:

"Much less. And I think they're terribly dull," which must have referred to the Borkau family. Whereupon they exchanged a wet sounding kiss and parted. "The beasts," I thought.

When I was tired of sitting in the dark, I rose, slouched off to my room, and did some packing. Although there was room in my trunk, the air-gun would not go in. I bent it and put it diagonally; still the top of the barrel would stick out. I tried this way and that, I took most of the things out of the trunk, but it was no good: the gun was too long. And suddenly misery assailed me, I realised that the whole world was up against me, scheming to thwart my best intentions, robbing me of every ray of joy and then maliciously showing me what I had lost. I pulled out the gun and flung it against the fender. The screw that held barrel and butt-end together snapped, the gun doubled up at an unnatural angle, and I fell on my bed and cried.

Had there been any causal connection between environment and character, that privileged position which I had enjoyed in Stargard would surely have made a bully of me. But it did not, for the simple reason that whatever my other vices, this quality is not in my nature. As a matter of fact, the eighteen months I had spent in Germany had no effect on me whatsoever. They were a kind of holiday which life gave me so that I might go on quietly with my physical growth. My environment was interesting enough to absorb my attention and pleasant enough to keep me from brooding, while remaining extraneous to me—a series of happenings, none of which affected me deeply, a superficially active existence such as in Europe is considered normal for that age but seldom falls to the lot of Russian boys.

For Russian life is, and always will be, restless and strained, full of swift changes, with drama lurking behind every corner, where one least expects it, where it has no business to be. There are no Stargards in Russia and there never will be. No government, Red, White or Beige, no revolution and no act of

God can create in the Russian that capacity for a lasting and uncritical acceptance of and resignation to the existing forms of life which is inherent in the German, Scandinavian or Englishman. Whether he likes it or not, the Russian must always long for what is not there, he must kick over the traces if life remains stationary for any length of time. Therein lie his weakness and his strength, his peculiar blend of Good and Evil (or rather intelligence and ignorance), his historical mission and his personal curse.

THE following year I spent studying with a tutor who prepared me for the Lytzey, the aristocratic school in which my father had decided to place me. I know he often questioned the wisdom of his decision. We were not aristocrats, just ordinary noblemen, and we certainly were not rich: apart from his salary, which was not large, we only had one ticket for the State lottery. He was afraid that the companionship of rich youths might make a snob of me and involve me in a false position; but on the other hand there was no doubt that the Lytzey would ensure a successful bureaucratic career for me.

I studied and I read Turgenev and adventure stories, Dickens and Fenimore Cooper and Tolstoy—anything I could lay hands upon. Probably I quarrelled with Lisa and played with Nina; probably I had some friends to whom I boasted of my independent life in Germany and the cocked hat which I was to wear in the Lytzey. But I remember nothing of that year, except experiments with a soldering pipe on metals, quinine and Cascara pills, and one glorious occasion when I found a three-rouble note on the pavement, right in front of our house.

I do not remember that year because I did not like it. I felt unsettled. I missed the freedom and the open-air life of Stargard. The Petersburg parks were but a wretched caricature of the Stargard woods, and the endless stony streets were depressingly impersonal: one could walk for hours without meeting anybody one knew. I did not get on with Lisa, and Nina was still a baby. Worst of all, I felt estranged from my mother. This was the result of the drama which I have mentioned in Chapter One. I could not forget that terrible night in Finland; it had erected an invisible barrier between me and my mother. She was an excellent, most unselfish woman; she loved me and I loved her, too, but that

love was broken now, I just felt miserable in her presence. I knew she suffered from my aloofness, and at night I would cry with pity for her, reproach myself for my heartlessness and make resolutions to be tender and easy with her. It was no good. I would come up to her, kiss her and start talking; but the transparent shadow of the past stood between us, my heart grew heavier and heavier, words refused to come to my mind; against my will I closed up and longed to go away, to my room, to Nina's, anywhere. Gradually out of this estrangement grew a critical attitude towards her. Being very kind, she spoilt us children, and I, with my new ideas of manliness, resented it and blamed her for what an adult would call sentimentality. She was of an excitable disposition, apt to worry over trifles, and that irritated me, probably because I was every bit as excitable, only I struggled hard with that quality in myself. Also I could not help thinking—and this is where my chief vice, intellectual arrogance, makes its first appearance—that she was not intelligent enough for me.

My relations with my father were on a sounder basis; fundamentally we were nearer to each other. But I did not see much of him. The paternal instinct was weak in him—as it is in me. He did not know what to do with us children; he would look in at the nursery, pat us on the heads, listen to us absent-mindedly, and leave us—just as I used to do with my children when they were little. His health, too, was giving way by that time: he often spent whole days on a divan in his study, reading or studying the blue files which the messenger brought from the Senate, or talking to my mother, who sat by his side and sewed. And sometimes we were told not to make any noise, because he was asleep: he had not slept the whole night.

In the spring I passed the entrance examination with distinction and won a scholarship, which in the Lytzey meant completely free education plus free board till the end of the course, including the university part of it. On coming back home from the last exam I found my mother sobbing: there had been a consultation of the doctors, and their verdict was diabetes and cancer. My father's days were numbered.



Still, we went to Finland in the summer. Now my father did not get up from bed at all, and every night I heard his groans, low long-drawn sounds which made me hide my head under the blanket. On the pretext of liking fresh air I had my bed moved to the open veranda; its roof leaked and the sun woke me early, but at least I did not hear those groans. I spent the day out of doors roaming about the woods with Volodya, a naval cadet, gathering mushrooms and shooting with a little rifle.

One night I was wakened by shots in the house. My mother and I rushed upstairs to my father's room. Through a cloud of acrid smoke we saw him sitting up in his bed in an attitude of exhaustion, his head hanging low, a revolver lying on his lap. He had fired six cartridges into the wall to avoid the temptation of putting an end to his suffering: he was a religious man.

His life was ebbing. Somebody put up my sisters, I was moved to Volodya's house on the other side of the lake. One day a wonderful thing happened: with my tiny rifle I managed to shoot a huge blackcock—a sheer fluke, of course. Wildly happy, I ran home. My mother was not downstairs, so with the bird in my hand I went upstairs and peeped into my father's room. He was lying motionless, my mother was kneeling by his side, crying softly. He had just died.

Petersburg. The coffin in the drawing-room; flowers and wax candles; a monk reading something unintelligible; the kneeling figure of my mother. She comes out to feed us; we hardly talk at meals and I avoid looking at her ravaged face. The meal over, she goes back to the coffin again. "O-toto-oo-toto-oo-toto," drones the monk; you hear him from every room, there is no getting away from his lugubrious chant. Lisa cries, Nina cries, cook cries. "What's it all for?" I reflect. "Why not bury him at once? And why do they cry?" I take a book and try to read, but I notice that I do not see the letters because of the tears in my eyes.

People come in, bringing more flowers, the air is sickly with their smell and the smell of incense. A priest arrives with the black-coated choir. They have coarse, drunken faces; they

throw off their coats in the hall, clear their throats, go into the drawing-room, and sing. The incense rises in a fog to my head, blurs my vision. *Requiem aeternam* they sing, and they sing well, too well: the wonderful tune swells and widens, shakes the blue smoky air, tears at my heart, crushes it, wrenches it from my breast. I rush back into the hall, fling myself on to the heap of black overcoats in the corner. Somebody talks to me, I push him away. "It's beastly!" I sob. "Why do they torture her, why? Why does God allow it? Curse Him, curse Him, curse Him . . ."

We moved into another flat, a much smaller one, and in September I went to the Lytzey.

## THE LYTZEY

THE Imperial Lytzey was founded in 1811 with a view to "preparing the sons of noble families for high posts in the Civil Service." It combined a secondary school with a University, so that the boys passed from one to the other without leaving the building. Originally the Lytzey had occupied a wing of the Tsar's palace at Tsarskoe Selo; the pupils, Pushkin among them, used the Tsar's park, met him occasionally, and talked to him. In the fifties the Lytzey had been moved to Petersburg, to a spacious building in a smart quarter—Belgravia, as it were—with a twenty-acre garden attached to it. The total number of pupils did not exceed 250; a quarter of them were titled.

The Lytzey was the most expensive school in Russia, the fees being £75 per annum. That sum covered not only education and full board—including holidays if the boy had nowhere to go—but also the cost of the uniform, linen, boots, and even ear-flaps for the winter: one could enter the Lytzey naked and finish it without spending a penny in extras, except white suède gloves. Out of school, the boys wore sky-blue coats with braided collars—silver or gold on red cloth—and cocked hats; at 40 degrees of frost ordinary caps and ear-flaps were allowed. The home uniform consisted of a short jacket, of the Eton type, but with gold buttons. In general there was an English flavour about the Lytzey, presumably dating back to the time of its foundation, when, along with the Anglo-Russian rapprochement brought about by Napoleon's Continental Blockade, a wave of English fashion had swept over the Russian high society (cf. *Eugene Onegin* and *War and Peace*). Thus, for instance, more attention was devoted to games and deportment than in other Russian schools; the programme was not so absurdly comprehensive; the regime more liberal. The pupils enjoyed a certain amount of self-government: they took part in the supervision of the garden

and the kitchen, and had a Comrades' Tribunal with wide limits of discretion: in my time two boys were expelled on the strength of the resolutions of that Tribunal.

My first impressions of the Lytzey were dimmed by the shock of my father's death. I was not thrilled by the fulfilment of my vain aspirations, and I felt out of tune with the boys. A religious mood had come upon me: I used to go to the school church every Saturday and Sunday, so naturally the boys decided I was a bigot. Also they all had money, and I had none; I could not share in the purchase of huge boxes of sweets and cakes, and had to walk across the Neva instead of driving in a smart cab or sleigh as they did. I did not know how to carry my relative poverty, I was ashamed of it, and they soon discovered that weak spot in me and started teasing me. They called me a stingy Jew, and once or twice I had to fight, much as I loathed it. Victory I found almost as disgusting as defeat. On the whole I felt self-conscious and very lonely.

The most remarkable of the boys in my form was Stas Chocinski, a Polish count, a tall slim boy with spiritually refined features and sad gentle eyes; he would have looked like St. John had it not been for his habit of keeping his mouth always open, which gave him a stupidly blank expression. There was a lack of co-ordination in his movements: he walked like an automaton with imperfectly adjusted springs; his arms seemed not to know what his legs were doing, and vice versa. I remember him first as he stood by the window, hurriedly catching the flies that crawled on the glass, despatching them into his mouth, and swallowing them. As he did so, he swayed from side to side and, with a look of torment in his eyes, chanted some extraordinary invocation, lugubrious and drawn out, while a group of boys watched him, rocking with laughter. That chant of his was to become very familiar indeed to all of us; we were to hear it for seven years, and the echo of it still passes in my head whenever I recollect the Lytzey. It consisted of the words: *Pfahd, Merak, Merez, Dubhe, Alnot, Misar, Benetnam*, the Arabic names of the seven stars which make up the Great Bear. This

Invocation covered all Stas' moods and all emergencies. When something upset him—and a trifle sufficed to do that—he would start chanting *Pfahd, Merak* in a crescendo of misery, hopping up and down on one place or wambling along the walls, and despondently dangling his long arms. He wrote these words on his textbooks and the walls of the lavatory; transposed into the major key, they expressed his triumph; whispered at a terrific speed they served as a charm against one or other of his particular friends being "called" by the master. No wonder Stas became the target for that playful cruelty which in boys takes the place of humour. They would mount him and make him career round the huge recreation hall till he was grey in the face and collapsed. They made him swim across the floor, standing by and timing him. Two of them would hold his hands whilst a third told him filthy stories which Stas abhorred. "Filth! Sin! Torture! Cholera! Dog's Blood!" he yelled in a mixture of Russian and Polish, his spiritual features distorted with pain. "*Pfahd, Merak, Merez. . .*" One evening a big doll was manufactured out of rags and placed in his bed; the boys turned low the wicks of the kerosene lamps, took him to the dormitory and told him that there was a woman in his bed. The effect was electric. With a low wail Stas darted back towards the door and disappeared. An hour passed, it was bedtime, and still there was no Stas. A search was instituted and finally we found him in the garden, miserably huddled up under Pushkin's monument, sodden with rain and frozen (it was November). He would not go back until we gave him our word of honour that there was no woman in his bed.

He had had a cheerless childhood with his father, a rich Polish landowner, apparently a sadist, who used to make him kneel down on a heap of dry peas or hold up his arms for ten minutes. (Try and see what it's like.) One night Stas had attempted suicide: he climbed up a tree and jumped down head first, but landed on his side and got off with a bad belly-ache. When speaking of his father he spluttered with rage and called him unprintable names:

then, repenting, he beat his head and applied the same epithets to himself. For he was a fervent Roman Catholic.

His kindness knew no bounds. Every penny he got from home he gave away to anyone who asked him for a "loan." He only felt happy when and so long as others wanted him, were it only for giving them a ride round the hall. When left alone, he was lost and miserable, he would slouch about the rooms, softly howling *Pfahd, Merak*, or inflict some violence on himself, slap his face, or run round the garden till he broke down. . . . Fifteen centuries ago he would have made a first-rate martyr; now he was but a simpleton, an innocent.

My first friend at the Lytzey was Mitya Vassilko, a swarthy long-legged boy with smiling coal-black eyes, an unmistakable Cossack; he even had that long curl which in the army every good Cossack trains above his left ear, letting it stick out picturesquely from under his cap. Mitya was a grown-up amongst us: we were about thirteen, he was fifteen and looked eighteen. He never bullied anyone and did not take much part in the games; he would lie for hours on the bench in the recreation hall doing nothing or playing the balalaika and softly singing in a pleasant voice, the very timbre of which made one melancholy. I felt he was superior to us in what I would now call the knowledge of life, and that was probably what attracted me to him.

One Saturday he took me to his home. "You mustn't mind my mother," he warned me. "She's a bit dotty."

And so she was. We were taking our things off when a door burst open and an elderly, slovenly, emaciated woman—not at all what the mother of a Lytzeyan ought to look like—rushed out and flung herself on Mitya's neck. One might have thought she had not seen him for years.

"Mitya, dear, there you are at last!" she cooed, kissing him and stroking his face with avid fingers. "Oh, how I've missed you all this week! You do look thin, darling. Why? Are you unwell? Haven't you had enough to eat?"

Mitya quietly freed himself from her embrace.

"Of course, I haven't," he said, much to my surprise,

since the food at the Lytzey was good and plentiful. "They keep us half starved there all the time."

"How disgusting of them!" she cried indignantly. "To charge £75 a year and not feed you properly! It's a disgrace! . . . But, Mitya, what about the five roubles I gave you last Sunday? Wasn't that enough to feed you up?"

"No. You see, I had to pay the lot for the wreath."

"What wreath?"

"A boy died in the top form, so there was a collection." Mitya pinched me. "Ask Gubsky if you don't believe me."

"Oh no, I believe you. But what an expensive school! First there was that present to your master, then that photograph, and now the wreath. You'll ruin me, Mitya, you will! Last month you cost me . . ."

"There, there," said Mitya good-naturedly and patronisingly, as though he were speaking to a little girl. "Stop complaining, Mother, and give us something to eat instead. We're both hungry."

"Oh yes, of course, of course," fussed the old lady. "I'll go and tell Masha . . ."

She shuffled off. We two went to Mitya's room, settled on his sofa and lit *Troika* cigarettes: three farthings for ten.

"Don't you believe a word she says about being poor," he said. "She's bursting with money, only she's as stingy as an old Jewess. A mania, you know," he added tolerantly. "That's why we live in this pigsty."

The flat was certainly not engaging: poky rooms, very shabby furniture, and a sour smell suggesting an artisan's home.

"You'll have to help me to-night," continued Mitya. "After the meal I'll leave you for a bit, so will you entertain the old girl while I'm away? Just let her chat and say Yes to everything she says, that'll keep her happy. But on no account let her get up."

"Why not?"

"You'll see why." He winked gaily.

We had high tea with plenty of home-made cakes. The meal over, Mitya rose and kissed his mother's hand: it

was usual in Russia to thank the hostess, even one's own mother, in this way after every meal.

"Do you mind, Mother," he asked, "if I go to your study and pray a little? Nikolai will keep you company."

The old lady beamed.

"Yes, Mitya, go. Pray in peace, I won't disturb you. Prayer is so good for the soul."

"Thank you, Mother."

He left and I stayed. She immediately started talking about her darling Mitya. She complained about the Lytzey; the boys there were all spoilt, dissolute and atheists, and might have a bad influence on Mitya, who was such a sensitive and responsive child, wasn't he? "Oh yes," I said, remembering his instructions, and she went on talking. She begged me to help him in what she called his spiritual struggle, she related touching episodes from his childhood. There was a sound of loud coughing in the study, and she cocked up her ears.

"He's got a cold," she said in alarm. "He always catches it, he has such delicate lungs. Ever since he was a baby . . ."

Presently Mitya reappeared, his face reflecting that inner peace which intense prayer is meant to convey.

"Did you pray well?" enquired Mme Vassilko.

"Yes, thank you, Mother," said Mitya modestly.

"I'm so glad. Prayer is the most important thing in life . . . Oh, but I must give you some aspirin; wait a second." She got up.

"Aspirin? Why aspirin?" Mitya was puzzled.

"Because you have a cold. Don't say you haven't, because I heard you cough just now when you were praying."

"Oh, that!" An amused twinkle flickered in his eyes. "All right, all right, go and bring your aspirin."

She went out and I looked questioningly at Mitya. I did not understand what it all meant.

"Fifteen roubles. Not bad," said Mitya laconically, and unclasped his hand. Two gold coins were lying in his palm, a ten-rouble and a five-rouble piece. "That beastly drawer of hers always gives a click when you open it; that's why I had to cough. And she thinks it's a cold. She is funny."



I was flabbergasted. This aspect of life was entirely new to me. It was wrong to steal, wrong, wrong!

Mitya guessed my feelings.

"Now don't start being silly," he said to me composedly. "Why shouldn't I take the money, since it's as good as mine? Yes, it is, she'll leave it all to me anyway, she's said so herself. And if she's so stingy, that's her fault, not mine. A fellow can't exist without pocket money, can he?"

It was not so much his reasoning as the sincerity of his tone and the gentle look in his eyes that convinced me. One could not be a wrongdoer with that look; and since the old woman had a lot of money and it was as good as his . . .

"We must have some fun to-night," he decided. "The first thing to do is to get away from here. . . . I know what. I'll tell her that we have to prepare geometry. She knows I haven't got the book, and you'll tell her that you keep yours at home, so then she'll have to let us go."

And that was what he told her. At first she would not hear of Mitya going out; it was late and cold and damp; he would catch bronchitis, pleurisy, pneumonia. In the end, however, he talked her round, having promised not to open his mouth in the street and be back by eleven. "Ugh!" he breathed with relief when we were out.

We repaired to a wine shop, bought a corkscrew, two glasses, a bottle of Petrov Brothers' Old Vintage Madeira (90 kopeks—1s. 9d.) and half a bottle of Maraschino, a drink for connoisseurs only, as Mitya said. Then we hired a sleigh and drove to the Islands, the Petersburg equivalent of the Bois de Boulogne. There we opened the bottles and drank. The cabman, too, got a generous allowance of Madeira, which he found "not bad, but a bit on the watery side." It was great fun. Mitya and I waded in the snow, played snowballs, wrestled, sang and laughed. The funniest thing was that one had no idea what one would do or say next, it always came unexpectedly, as a surprise. One did not feel the frost at all, and one did not even mind being sick.

When the bottles were empty, we climbed into the sleigh and drove back, embracing each other and singing the beauty

of Mother Volga. We reached Mitya's house, and here he had an inspiration.

"Let's go to your house for a change," he proposed. "I'm fed up with these scenes at home, I must have a rest. . . . Do you think your mother will mind?"

I was delighted at the idea, so I said No and we drove on.

My mother was very distressed when she saw my haggard countenance, but Mitya put the matter right. He had a much stronger head than I, plenty of self-assurance, and a way with women.

"Don't worry, Mme Gubsky," he said, patting me on the back. "He isn't really drunk, he only looks it because he's unused to wine. You see, it was a birthday party, and we simply had to drink. I'll look after him if you'll let me, and put him to bed. And perhaps you'll kindly allow me to stay the night here?"

She had no objections to that. As we had no spare room, a mattress was laid on the floor parallel to my bed, and Mitya helped me to undress. I lay down and ceased to exist.

I woke up in the morning with the impression that a hurricane was raging in the room. But it was only Mme Vassilko. Her shabby fur coat thrown open, her hat pathetically awry on her head, her eyes tear-stained; she was kneeling on the floor by Mitya's mattress, sobbing, laughing and stroking his face. Our maid stood open-mouthed in the doorway, too amazed at the scene to think of discretion.

"You naughty, naughty boy! Have you no pity for your old mother?" wailed Mme Vassilko. "What a fright you gave me! I thought you were frozen or killed or drowned; I couldn't sleep the whole night, and I prayed and I prayed. Why didn't you come home, Mitya, why? You promised."

"Don't shout so loud," said Mitya sleepily. "There's nothing to fuss about. We'd been doing geometry till midnight, and I was so tired that I simply couldn't go back, so I stayed here. And now go and apologise to Mme Gubsky for making so much noise." He patted her hand gently. "Be a good girl, there. I'll be back some time in the day."

She went and we slept on.

My mother soon grew fond of Mitya. He was a good soul, easy-going, very considerate and domesticated. Unlike myself he knew how to be interested in little things of everyday life and sympathise with her worries; he would play for hours with my sisters and joke with our maid—all this quite naturally, not for the sake of anybody's approval, but because it was his nature to be affable.

He was a democrat from head to foot. Sometimes when calling on him I found him in the hall by the front door, smoking and chatting with the porter, or he would be sitting on the steps of the back staircase—a smelly place it was—and strumming his balalaika to an appreciative audience of cooks and maids from the other flats. Since our uniform restricted the freedom of his movements, he would put on mufti, give me his spare jacket and a disreputable overcoat, and thus attired we would roam about the town, braving the risk of detection, which would have meant immediate expulsion. We used to go to the "Panopticum" (The Bearded Woman, the Lilliputian Idyll), to the fairs and low-class pubs, where we drank tea in the company of cabmen and hawkers. Mitya had a knack of dealing with plain folk; they talked to him as freely and easily as though he were one of them, although he made no attempts at disguising his educated speech. He excelled at practical jokes, but they were always mild and harmless. For instance, he would call at a tobacconist's, chat with the man at the counter, and then tell him that an eclipse was forthcoming; there would be no sun for a week, so he'd better lay in a stock of candles. Once we called at a grocer's, and Mitya gravely enquired whether there were any canaries for sale. To our great surprise the man said Yes and took us to a room behind the counter, a kind of aviary, in which some fifty cages hung so thickly that one could not see a bit of the ceiling. The man proved to be a bird maniac; manipulating a complicated system of trolleys and strings, he took down one cage after another and treated us to a detailed account of each canary: its habits, its vocal and sexual achievements, and its price. One of them, I remember, was rated as highly as £10; I forget why. He ended by asking

us to have tea with him, but we were tired of his birds and deafened by their twittering, so we left after having bought two herrings, which we gave to a cat in the street.

On another occasion we were walking—this time in uniform—along a dismal street. In one of the houses a basement window was open on a level with the pavement, and a plain-faced, tired-looking woman was standing by the window wistfully gazing into space. Mitya stopped.

“Hullo, is that you, Marya Ivanovna?” he cried. “I’m so glad to have found you at last. Where have you been all this time?”

I knew his method. She would say that her name was not Marya Ivanovna at all, and he would maintain that it was, for hadn’t he met her at the Prokofievs’ last year? She would deny that; she didn’t know any Prokofievs, had never heard the name. “What?” Mitya would cry in astonishment. “You mean to say you don’t know Petr Pavlitch?” And so they would go on until she was quite muddled.

But this time it happened otherwise. At Mitya’s first words an expression of extraordinary joy flooded the woman’s face. “They’ve come, they’ve come!” she shouted, turning to someone in the room. Then addressing us: “Do come in, please!” she begged. “I’ve been waiting for you the whole day.”

We were utterly bewildered and thought of dashing away, but it was too late: the woman was standing on the doorstep already, waving to us. “Let’s risk it,” whispered Mitya, and we went down the steps into what looked like a workman’s flat, poor but tidy. An elderly man, the husband of the woman, was sitting in the reception room; he got up and bowed to us, we bowed to him.

Her husband, we learned, was out of work, and they were starving. But that did not worry her any more. For a fortune-teller had just told her the other day that two uniformed gentlemen would call, and that within a week of that call her husband would get a very good job. “Isn’t it wonderful! Isn’t it a miracle!” she cried time after time. In her joy she even forgot to ask Mitya about the mythical Prokofievs.

On parting he gave them all the money he had with him: he thought something must be done to encourage them. I am positive the woman had not played a trick on us: that sudden look of happiness in her eyes could not possibly have been faked.

A little later Mitya hit upon a brilliant idea: he decided he would look for his unknown relatives. From the Directory he took down the addresses of a dozen people who bore the name of Vassilko, and we proceeded to call on them. We did it in uniform, I passing for his younger brother.

Our experiences were varied. In one place a sinister-looking female after having listened to Mitya's explanatory speech said: "Last month all my silver was stolen by a smart young man of your kind, so if you don't leave this moment I'll shout for help." On another occasion we were received by a thin gaunt spinster with two incredibly fat dogs. I have never seen such fat dogs in my life; they no longer resembled dogs, they could not walk, but crawled, panting heavily, on their bellies. As we conversed with the lady, something upset them; they got up, shook with excitement and emitted a kind of death-rattle which made Mitya and me rock with laughter. We laughed and laughed and could not stop; the lady frowned more and more darkly, and we ended by beating an undignified retreat.

We actually found two relations of Mitya's that way. One was a Cossack officer who at once made us blind drunk with some filthy champagne from the quiet-flowing Don; the other, a major of the police, a spurious gentleman of seventy, a typical *vieux roué* with a maladjusted wig and dyed moustache. A young girl of not more than twenty with a picture postcard face was with him; she was his fiancée, he paid court to her with senile animation and asked us both to his wedding. He was rather loathsome, and we did not go.

Practical jokes and aimless roaming alternated with drinking. We drank anywhere: in sleighs, at my flat or Poup's (Poup in Russian means Navel). The supply of gold coins in Mme Vassilko's drawer seemed inexhaustible; for my part I contributed a little towards our common fund by selling my watch and my stamp album, or wangling a few

roubles from my mother. However drunk he was, Mitya never lost his head and never got into trouble. I, on the other hand, always drank till the final knock-out. I remember climbing up a lamp-post—in uniform; hurling myself into an elastic wire net drawn round somebody's garden, and crawling under a cabman's horse; losing Mitya and waking up on a snow-heap opposite his house, with a policeman sympathetically grinning over me: I gave him a rouble, he saluted, helped me on to my feet, and fetched a sleigh for me (in those days it would not have paid a policeman to make trouble for the wearer of a cocked hat). One morning I woke up in a dark bare room I had never seen before. I did not like the look of it, so I got up and tried to open the door; it was locked. I felt cold all over: I was in jail! . . . As a matter of fact, I was in Poup's flat: he had taken me with him and stowed me away in a closet. The door had not been locked, but the handle happened to be a tricky one, which only worked when you pulled the door your way.

My mother let me do what I liked. A self-willed, opinionated boy of thirteen who stays away from home for six days a week is a tough proposition anyhow; and she was passive by nature, not made for fighting. She felt sore about my dissolute life, she tried to reason with me, but soon gave it up. Unwittingly—for she must have reproached herself for her weakness—she had adopted the wisest course. For it is my firm belief that discipline should be confined to the creation of positive habits for everyday use but must not be applied to forming the boy's morality. Life will do that much better. Therefore, if the boy is eager to live, let him have an early taste of life, real, ugly, even dangerous life; it will act as an inoculation. If at present I can enjoy drinking (Vincent says that good wine brings out a special coy look in my eyes) and yet can easily do without wine for months, this is due to my having drunk a lot at school: after those strong brutal alcoholic sensations of which I had a good measure between thirteen and twenty, the ordinary "decent" inebriation is of no interest to me, and that is why I am immune from the

wine habit. Which is the main thing. For the danger of wine is not the temporary blurring of the mind during and after a spree, but the permanent hold which wine is apt to take of a man. Both from the physiological and psychological points of view it is much better to be gloriously drunk once in a blue moon than to need so many whiskies a day, every day. My son, who is now thirteen, does not get a drop of wine for months, but once or twice a year I let him drink till he staggers on his legs. I want him to *know* what wine is, for I believe in knowledge more than in anything else.

One Saturday night Mitya was staying with me. As usual, a mattress was laid for him parallel to my bed and an oval table was put between us. In the middle of the night I woke. The little oil lamp before the ikon was burning—my mother always lit it on Saturdays. Mitya was breathing peacefully within a yard of me. I turned towards him, and there on the floor under the oval table I saw a devil. He was tiny, some twelve inches high, slim and black, with horns and a long rat's tail—the traditional devil of the cheap religious lithographs manufactured for the edification of the mujik. He stood perfectly motionless, like a statue, but somehow I knew he was alive. I certainly was not dreaming; everything in the room was far too ordinary and peaceful for a dream. Nor was I drunk. Neither I nor Mitya had had a drop the night before; I had spent the evening on the sofa with a headache, he had played with my sisters and talked to my mother. I remember glancing at the oil lamp before the ikon and noting with atheistic satisfaction its impotence against the forces of hell. I felt no fear whatever, only astonishment: the whole thing was too preposterous to be frightening.

Then I noticed that Mitya grew restless on his mattress. With his eyes still shut he began to mumble, turned on his side towards me, and slowly, sleepily began to extend his arm towards the devil under the table. He was just about to touch him when a sudden terror seized me. "Mitya!" I shouted, and the same moment the devil vanished, dissolved in the air. Mitya sat up, rubbing his eyes, and I proceeded

to tell him what I had seen. "That's funny," he said when I had finished. He, it appeared, had just dreamt of a devil; they fought, Mitya got him into a corner and was going to throttle him when I interfered. . . . Thought transference?

One day Mitya took me to his mistress's. She had an elegant little flat, was thirty and good-looking, but too stout for my taste and unmistakably stupid. She sat on his knees, they said silly things to each other and kissed, which was both boring and disturbing. I smoked, tried to look unconcerned, and was glad when the visit was over. "You can have her if you like. I've had enough of her," said Mitya, to which I replied grandly: "I don't think I want her, thanks."

Another day we went—in mufti—to the People's House, a kind of Coney Island on a smaller scale. We had a drink or two in the bar and watched a sword-swallower (he nearly choked with the blade half-way down his throat). Two girls were standing next to us, one of them complaining to the other about a bad tooth she had. "It's this one," she said, opening her mouth as wide as she could and pointing with her finger at the tooth in question. Naturally Mitya too peeped into her mouth. "What a heavenly sight!" he said with unction. The girls giggled and called him a silly. Contact being thus established, they joined us, and we saw some more sights together. They were both pretty, I thought, and quite nice, especially Liudmila, the younger one, whom I was escorting. I took them for shop-girls and only discovered my mistake when we found ourselves in a cheap hotel and Mitya ordered two rooms. "You and Liudmila take this one, and we'll take that," he said.

I met Liudmila at the People's House the following Saturday and the Saturday after that. She was a nice girl, gay, simple and quite decent: she never said anything filthy. I did not experience any of that disgust which is supposed to follow the First Fall; on the contrary, I must have been slightly infatuated with her, for when on the third Saturday she failed to turn up I felt sad. For some time I would not hear of any substitutes, but Mitya remonstrated with me, so



one night I drank an extra glass of wine and picked up another girl. She was not satisfactory at all, nor was her successor. And then I had a salutary fright.

When the doctor whistled, Phew! and told me what was the matter, I sank into a chair and promptly fainted. The figure 606 was still unknown at that time, and the ugly Greek word he had uttered meant the unavoidable ruin of a man's life, complete with the crumpling up of his nose. On coming round I drank some water and on wobbly legs repaired to another doctor. He confirmed his colleague's verdict.

This was in the afternoon. I went home, undressed and went to bed, pretending that I had a cold. There I lay, trembling in every limb, my teeth chattering, praying to the God in whom I did not believe. I swore that should He let me off this time, only this time, I would never, never do it again. Then, realising that I was trying to drive a bargain, I corrected myself: whatever happened I would never do it again. The afternoon passed; evening came and turned into night. The trembling continued, it would not cease for a moment. All feeling, all thought was drowned in a hollow, nauseating horror. At times it seemed to me that I was going mad, had gone mad already, and then I wanted to shout for my mother and tell her. So far as I remember I did not think of suicide. I wonder why.

But a miracle happened: in the morning I knew beyond doubt that it had been a false alarm. When Mother came into my room I had a hysterical fit, but I did not tell her even then. God, as I soon realised, had nothing to do with the matter, yet I knew that I would keep my oath, not because it was an oath, but out of fright. And thus, at the age of fourteen years and two months, my career as a street lover came to an abrupt end.

It was high time too. I had nothing left to pawn, I felt increasingly ashamed of wangling roubles out of my mother, and Mme Vassilko must have noticed the chronic depletion of her treasury, for it had disappeared from her creaking desk, and try as he might Mitya could not detect the new hiding-

place. So all we two could manage was an occasional bottle of Petrov Brothers' Vintage Madeira (which was not bad, but left a taste of turpentine in one's mouth), and a purely platonic visit to the People's House. We met less and less often, and I noticed that his interest in me was flagging. Soon I discovered that he was in love, seriously in love.

One Saturday night in April he called on me as I was going to bed. I must come with him, it was most important, he said mysteriously, and we went out. At the kerb stood a closed carriage into which he shoved me. A girl was there; in the perfumed darkness I could only see her silhouette but not her face. Mitya introduced us. She was Lila, his fiancée, whom he loved more than man had ever loved a woman; I was his faithful friend, and if I did not want to be a pig I would be his best man at the wedding. For Mitya had resolved to chuck the Lytzey ("What's the good of it, anyway?") and marry without delay. He was only sixteen, but that figure, he thought, could easily be altered into eighteen on his passport. As for money, his mother was sure to give him something, but if not . . . oh, well! where there was love, money did not matter.

For a couple of hours we drove about the cold streets, the lyrical couple keeping warm by kissing, I freezing and envying Mitya. Then we took Lila to her home. I remember some appallingly tasteless furniture, a father who looked like a come-down actor, and a dish of pistachios which I ate all the time because there was nothing else for me to do. Lila was pretty but vulgar.

Soon after that Mitya was caught strolling in mufti—past the Lytzey, if you please—and promptly expelled. I lost touch with him. And in the summer, when I was in the Caucasus, he killed Lila at the unusual hour of seven in the morning. He rang the bell, pushed the maid aside, ran into Lila's bedroom and emptied his revolver into her. Motive—jealousy. I took it for granted that he would go to Siberia (capital punishment existed in Russia only for political crimes).

After that I only saw him once, and that was many years later, in 1915. We met in the street. He was in the uniform

of a Cossack officer, with a cross on his chest, a tall fur hat, and a smart Cossack curl coming up from under it. As he had some appointment to keep our talk was short. No, he had not been to Siberia, not even to prison: he had simulated madness, and done it well enough to deceive the doctors. "I had a good training at home, as you know," he said with his old amused twinkle. He was married and had three children: "splendid brats," he said proudly.

Life at the Lytzey was at first rather boring without Mitya. Out of boredom, and also to impress the boys with my maturity, I indulged in filthy language and brought pornographic pamphlets to school. Of that, too, I was cured, the doctor this time being Yakontov, one of our masters. He was a fine man, whom we all respected, strict and stiff in his manner but essentially very amiable and friendly, a typical English gentleman, and an Old Boy at that. One day he caught me reading aloud with great gusto a manuscript of Pushkin's famous *Gavriliada*, that obscene poem about the Virgin Mary and the Archangel Gabriel which had cost the poet a most humiliating interview with Nicholas I. Yakontov took the manuscript from me, and glanced at it. He said nothing, he only compressed his lips fastidiously and unclasped his fingers; the manuscript fluttered to the floor and I felt as nasty as Pushkin. It is only natural that my ways should have improved after that lesson; it is not so natural but more characteristic of me, more individual, that I should have conceived a hero worship for Yakontov. In time we became good friends.

That summer I spent in the South with my uncle's family. He was a stout, fleshy-faced, kindly nonentity; why his wife had chosen him I could never understand. For she had, if anything, too much character, and was, even when I knew her, very lovely indeed, a typical Tartar beauty with finely chiselled features and huge almond-shaped eyes. When she was at Smolny—the school for noble girls, later on Lenin's headquarters—the Tsar Alexander III used to dance the cotillion with her. The whole of Petersburg had been at her

feet; Turgenev had dedicated one of his poems to her (a bad one). Now she was stiff and prudish and dull; to listen to her was boring, to look at her a delight. She had a daughter, Xenia, a massive silly girl of twenty-two.

Immediately after my arrival at Kislovodsk—which is a smart spa in the Northern Caucasus—I had to act as best man to a certain Stakeyev, a young millionaire merchant who was romantically marrying the daughter of a little railway clerk. He had never seen me before, but he had heard that I had brought my cocked hat with me, hence the invitation. It was a frightfully rich wedding, with plenty of champagne. After the wedding we all drove somewhere, I kneeling in the carriage and declaring my passion to Jenya, a pretty Georgian girl, who gave me both her hands to kiss and laughed at me; my aunt saw the scene from another carriage and blew me up at home (by Jove, she knew how to do it!). Everyone of Stakeyev's best men—and there were twelve of them—got as a souvenir a golden medallion with precious stones (in due time I pawned mine for £10), and in the evening the young couple departed for Monte Carlo. The following summer the bride was back at her father's home and wore my aunt's discarded stockings and skirts. Stakeyev was in Monte Carlo; his millions were gone, he could not even pay his fare back.

At Kislovodsk a young engineer with a soft fluffy moustache fell in love with my cousin and hung on to her the whole day long. That I did not mind, but unfortunately my aunt had antediluvian ideas of *bon ton*, and made me accompany the tender couple wherever they went, which was boring beyond words. Things became easier with the arrival of Anya, my cousin's friend. She was a pleasant girl, modest, quiet, mouselike, but with a queer kink in her character. One day, as we were all having lunch, she suddenly fired off some exceedingly obscene verses, reciting them in the same subdued, slightly hesitant manner which she used for saying ordinary things. I choked into my plate; my aunt flung down her napkin and walked out; her husband meekly followed her. "What's the matter? Why have they gone?" Anya asked me

in naïve surprise. When in turn I asked her if she knew the meaning of the verses, she said "No," and I could not make out whether her ignorance was genuine or feigned.

The worst thing about her was her singing. She imagined herself a second Patti, and since to be inspired she had to have a big audience, she usually sang in the public park. To me, her Cicerone, that was an ordeal. She would step into the bushes only a few yards off the path and intone some operatic aria in a piercing and singularly unpleasant soprano, magnificently heedless of the giggles and comments of the passers-by. She had given two public concerts the year before, and on both occasions the public had hooted her off the platform. "They're fools, they don't understand singing," she said to me, and added that she was going to give another concert in September.

When in a country inn at which we were having coffee, some drunken Caucasians started joking at our expense, Anya picked up her riding whip, went over to them, said something in her usual low voice, and they fell silent at once. I did not hear what she said, I only saw her face: it was quiet but very pale, and her eyes had an odd fixed look in them.

The following summer, at my uncle's house, she met a young doctor. That was at lunch-time, and in the evening, when the doctor was taking the train to Odessa, they became engaged. For several months they did not see each other; then he was arrested for political reasons and put in prison. Without saying a word to her family Anya quietly collected her things, went to Odessa, and married him in the prison church. . . .

In August we hired a Cossack hay cart and went to the foot of the Elbruz, a distance of some forty miles. We went without roads, driving right across the even, gently sloping steppe. The driver, who had had too much vodka, lost the direction, and at nightfall there was still no trace of the hut we were heading for. We drove on in complete darkness. At length the horses stopped; no amount of beating and shouting could make them move, and, willy-nilly, we had to camp in the open. Our only box of matches had fallen into a puddle;

it was raining, and so dark that one could not see one's own hand. The three ladies settled in the cart under the hay; the driver wrapped himself up in his voluminous sheepskin and lay down under the cart; I, who had no shelter and no overcoat, danced about. It began to snow. The ladies pitied me, but could not part with their hay; the driver snored lustily. Drenched to my bones I danced all the night, feeling very miserable. Finally the darkness began to soften, the silhouettes of the cart and the horses emerged from the night; then a patch of ground round the cart, and then I saw something which made me gasp. Right in front of the horses, only two or three yards from them, the even steppe broke abruptly and fell in a sheer drop in an abyss. That, of course, was why the horses had refused to go on.

A little later I beheld another sight which made me forget the cold and the misery of my body. Out of the grey morning haze the gigantic double-headed pyramid of the Elbruz was emerging, a phantom of incredible height, its outlines faint at first, like the design of a Japanese artist, then clearer and sharper, acquiring depth and solidity, its colour changing every moment imperceptibly, incomprehensibly, from ethereal pink to green, from green to blue, a blue such as did not and could not exist in man's universe. I danced and cried, but not because of the cold. . . .

One has to be tuned up and shaken to take in a really big impression, take it deeply enough to keep it for life. The beauty of the Elbruz would not have revealed itself to me as forcibly as it did if I had not paid for it, if I had reached the hut in a comfortable car, with warm rugs around me and hot drink inside me. The student who has stood for three hours in a queue to hear Rachmaninov gets more out of the concert than his well-off colleague who has ordered his seat over the 'phone, and more still than the man who switches on the wireless without leaving his armchair—the word “more” applying in these cases not to enjoyment but to the intensity and durability of the impression, its power of resisting the action of time. No doubt, women of A.D. 4900 will bless science for having made their pregnancy

as short and easy as it is for hens; but, whether they will be aware of it or not, something valuable will have disappeared from motherhood; it will be less significant, and poorer. And I do not believe that easy cloudless courtships, pleasant though they may be, are the best preparation for married life. . . .

## THE LYTZEY—II

I REGRET to say that the programme of the Lytzey thirty years ago was more rational than that of most English schools to-day, meaning by "rational" less obedient to mildewy scholastic traditions and more conformable to the actual requirements of a modern civilised man. We had some science, no Greek at all and a little Latin, on sufferance. Geography and History were not confined to Russia: we learnt about potato-growing in Ireland and the industries of Sheffield, Magna Charta and Anne Boleyn.\* Modern languages—French, German and English, all of them compulsory—were taught pretty thoroughly: not a word of Russian was spoken during these lessons. On the whole we worked about as much as boys do in an average English school, that is to say considerably less than in Germany or France.† Twice a week we had military drill, and twice dancing lessons: a wasp-waisted French *petit maître*, twisting his body in graceful curves, taught us the Viennese Waltz, the Pas de Quatre, the Mazurka and the Hongroise.

Stas had a busy time. He was the self-appointed tutor to half a dozen slackers, and he acquitted himself of this task with the conscientiousness of a mediæval martyr. Day in, day out, he worked at the rate of twelve hours a day, and more at the time of the exams. First he learned the subject for himself, memorising it from A to Z, since he was not much good at understanding. Then he prepared a set of cribs for his parasites; they usually found the cribs either too long or not long enough, and made him rewrite them. Only then did the tutoring proper begin. By means of cajoling, lamentations and the pulling of sleeves, he would collect his pupils and start explaining to them the mysteries of quadratic

\* My wife in her final examination had to write an essay on the subject of Richardson's heroines: Pamela and Clarissa.

† My wife's nephew who is just about to leave a lycée in France writes that for his Matriculation he has to read 93 books!



equations or the queer distinctions between Get up, Get at, Get off, etc. They yawned, gazed at the ceiling, and dozed. To liven them up he raised his voice and increased the tempo of his explanations until he became quite unintelligible. They called him an idiot, threw books at him, and told him to start all over again; but when he did so, they protested that they had heard it all already, and anyhow they were fed up with the whole bally thing and must have a rest. "Don't go, Poup! Don't go, Mishka!" wailed Stas. "I'll be done in a minute!" But their power of endurance was exhausted; they walked out, and Stas, left alone, rocked from side to side and with a tortured look in his eyes intoned lugubriously: *Pfahd Merak*.

When Poup, his favourite, about whose progress Stas was particularly worried, and whose cribs he wrote with particular care, failed in Algebra, Stas realised that life was not worth living. He went to the outskirts of Petersburg, took a room in a dingy hotel for one-and-fourpence, and drank half a bottle of vodka and a small bottle of opium. The results were devastating both to the furniture of the room and to Stas's inside: two waiters brought him back, half dead, to the Lytzey, where he was placed in hospital. But on the following day he ran away from the hospital, repaired to a deserted place on the quay and descended the steps leading to the Neva. The Neva was black and cold—the ice of the Ladoga Lake had just passed—and his courage failed him. He called himself Cholera and Dog's Blood, smote himself on the cheeks, recited Paternoster fourteen times and Ave Maria twenty-six times, but in vain. Then he decided to die gradually. He sat down on the steps and, softly howling *Pfahd, Merak*, immersed his feet in the water. After a while he moved a step lower, then another and yet another, and would have ended by falling in had it not been for a policeman who espied him. "What are you doing, Sir?" enquired the policeman, saluting, and Stas, his wits benumbed by the cold, mumbled: "I'm trying to fish out my hat," although his cocked hat was on his head and quite dry. The policeman dragged him up—Stas's legs would not hold him—hailed a cab, and once more Stas found himself in hospital. "What

a cretin!" said Poup callously when he heard of the incident and its causes.

The discipline at the Lytzey was rather loose. When we did not like a master, we let him know it. The standard procedure was the so-called Festival of the Hyænas. A very faint hum, not unlike the sound of a faraway 'cello, would arise at some undefinable spot in the classroom and gradually increase in volume and area. In an even crescendo it swelled into a howl and then into a roar. There were thirty-three of us, and no one was allowed to stay out of it. The pedagogue would complain, we would have our leaves cancelled and be put under arrest in a bare closet for a day or two—no books, no cigarettes, nothing—but these reprisals only made us the fiercer. At the next lesson, to the howling of the hyænas the stamping of feet and the rattling of desks would be added. From a villa adjoining our garden we would steal a couple of hens, stuff them into our desks (hens keep perfectly quiet in the dark), and let them loose in the middle of the lesson. On one occasion carbide was resorted to. The end of it was always the same: the master had to go. We ourselves could never make out what made us rag this or that master. They were all decent men, civil and well-meaning, but somehow they did not suit us. With boys popularity is almost as irrational as it is with grown-ups.

Our Latin master was Mr. Malein, a very gentle little man. We thought him a dear and forgave him for his revolting subject. We did not even mind his "calling" us now and again: after all it was his duty. But in exchange we insisted on his respecting our rights and not interfering with our private lives. Some of us slept at his lessons, others read some "reading books": *The New Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*, or *Rinaldo Rinaldini*. The latter was—or rather had been—a huge volume of 1200 pages stuffed with the most enthralling fights, murders and conspiracies; we had torn off the cover and divided the text into a score of approximately equal instalments, which circulated about the class without any regard for their sequence, the story being of such nature that it did not matter in what order you went through it. Some of us (I repeat

that this account is strictly truthful) would fetch mattresses from the dormitory, spread them behind the back desks, and lie down to read or smoke into the ventilators which were almost on the level of the floor. I brought a syringe from home, and it was great fun to direct the thin jet of water at the head of some unsuspecting comrade, in particular Tit who sat in front of me and whose faultless parting—it came right down to his neck—was a most tempting target. Tit then concluded a defensive alliance with Poup, who sat behind me, and the next time I opened hostilities, Poup produced a pail of water from under his desk and poured its contents over me. This time Mr. Malein thought we had gone too far; he pouted, collected his papers, and prepared to go. We then resorted to the so-called Squadron Drill, that is to say, we galloped with our desks towards him, barring his way to the exit and howling for mercy. Being very kind, he forgave us and resumed his droning about Cæsar's senseless campaigns.

Not that we always behaved as badly as that: most of the lessons passed quietly and dully, some of them even in an atmosphere of fear. French, for instance, belonged to that category, perhaps because M. Lacime was six foot four and looked quite capable of knocking the lot of us into a heap.

In our free time we played ping-pong, introduced at the Lytzey by Mr. William Webb, our English master; in spite of his sixty years he beat most of us at it. The outdoor games were *Gorodki* and Football. *Gorodki* are a kind of skittles. Two squares are drawn on the ground, some fifteen yards apart; a score of little logs, the size of a half-pint bottle, are placed in each square, and these you try to drive out of the enemy's camp by throwing long heavy sticks at them. Football was a modification of the English soccer. As in England we had a field, two goals and a round ball; the difference was that we only kicked the ball when we were in a mood for it. Should we be talking to someone or simply feeling hot and lazy, we let the ball pass; and if our side swore at us, we swore back or walked away. Perhaps someone else stepped into our place, perhaps not. The counting of goals was a complicated affair which gave rise to various unexpected problems: did

a goal count if the goalkeeper was mounting Stas at the critical moment? Or if the victorious party numbered fourteen players and the vanquished only ten?

Like any other form in any other school, ours comprised highbrows, lowbrows, and just boys. The first group made a great fuss about studying, behaved in a dignified manner, and in general took themselves seriously. These were the Wise Chickens—an excellent definition of people with the academic mentality, whether they learn or teach. The lowbrows were fools of the ordinary species, satisfied with themselves—as fools must be—dull and irritating, some of them amusing. The most amusing one was Serge. He was a liar of the classical school which has been extinct in England since Dickens's times, and, I believe, has died out in Russia by now. He would come back from leave on Sunday night and calmly announce that he had just shot two walruses in the Neva; when we defied him to produce the bodies he would say that he had left them at the furrier's to be stuffed. Or he would tell us that when swimming in the Volga one day he had fallen asleep and been carried by the current into the Caspian Sea; or that he had trained his setter to indicate the size of the covey with his tail: as many wags as birds. His *chef-d'œuvre* was the story of the Aspirin for the Tsar. One evening Serge was walking along the Moika Canal, near the Winter Palace, when he noticed abreast of him an elderly peasant-like woman whose face seemed familiar to him. Imagine his surprise when he recognised in the woman H.I.M. Maria Fedorovna, the Dowager Empress! "What are you doing here, Your Imperial Majesty?" asked Serge anxiously. "Aren't you afraid of walking like that by yourself?" "Oh no," said the Dowager Empress. "You see, I'm just going to the chemist's to get some aspirin for dear Nicholas. They're so terribly slow at the Palace that I thought I'd do it more quickly myself . . ." In 1918, during the Revolution, the peasants locked Serge in a barn and burned him alive.

The third group, the one I belonged to, were just boys. There was Nelidov, a plump good-natured youth and a first-rate musician: he played the piano, composed and sang; he

had a velvety baritone of Chaliapin's timbre. Being very lazy he did not do anything with his talent until the Revolution drove him out of Russia; then, after a period of starvation, he became conductor at the Royal Opera in Belgrade. There was Bomba (short for Counter-Bombardon, a *sobriquet* given him on account of his deep bass voice), philosopher and *raconteur*, millionaire and miser; he knew Pushkin by heart and had a genius for making others pay for him. In 1914, he was the only one amongst us who had the courage to say that the martial patriotism we all revelled in at the time was sheer bunkum. There was Poup, a sturdy, round-faced boy, an excellent companion in any ragging; he was killed in 1914, in the suicidal attack of the Horse Guards on the German batteries. There was Andrey, the leader of the form, clear-minded, thorough, grown-up; he was the first among the "decent" people to join the Bolsheviks in 1917, and I am proud to say that, White though I was at the time, I never condemned him or doubted his integrity: if he had done it, it was the right thing for him to do. And finally there was Tit, a boisterous Southerner, cynically-minded and kind-hearted, with a light sparkling intelligence, a fine poetic gift which he let lie fallow, and tons of vanity: he would have given half his life to reduce his protuberant nose to normal proportions. He was my bosom friend, he used to cheer me up with his happy-go-lucky wisdom and infuriate me with his snobbishness. The Bolsheviks killed him in 1918. . . .

After a year's stay at the Lytzey I grew quite acclimatised to it, so much so that I often did not go home for the weekend. I excelled at Gorodki and ping-pong, took part in any ragging that was going on, teased the Wise Chickens, listened to Nelidov's singing, and worked in moderation. In fact, I was a normal boy—normal considering the environment—and remained so till the end of the course.

My impecuniousness made itself felt more and more acutely as we grew up and got used to spending money. I did not participate in the social life of my friends outside the Lytzey, this chiefly on account of my coat. Stas and I were the only ones in the form who could not afford "private" coats and

wore those given by the school; they were of a clumsy cut and the metal of the braid was of inferior quality. I did not go to the soirées or balls, or to the wrestling contests—the Russian equivalent of Wimbledon Tennis—or to the *Concours Hippiques*, the gathering place of the gilded youth. While my comrades drove about in sleighs or cabs, I had to walk. From home they brought huge quantities of sweets; I brought none. They did not snub me, but all the same I often felt the bitter taste of envy, often resorted to petty subterfuges to hide the humiliating fact of my relative poverty, and sometimes regretted being at a school where I could not keep pace with the rest. But it was an excellent training, not of character—since character is given and cannot be trained—but in positive self-consciousness, which is a prelude to self-knowledge.

My uncle sent me one pound a month, and that was all my income. Some ten per cent of it went on suède gloves, the rest on wine. Whenever I could I drank, and whenever I drank it was, as we said in Russia, to the seventh degree, this being the point at which one stops drinking because one ceases to exist. In my life there is a gap of several hours for which neither I nor anyone else can account. This was after a razzle at Poup's flat. I was taken in an unconscious state to the Lytzey, smuggled past the form master, and put to bed. According to the porter's evidence, I came down at midnight, fully dressed, and left the building. At five in the morning I was back, leaning with my forehead against the glass of the front door and banging it furiously. The porter let me in—my boots, he said, looked as though I had crossed a swamp—and I stumbled upstairs to the dormitory. Of all this I remember nothing, nor have I an idea what I did during those five hours. A prostitute was murdered that night in the suburbs, and Tit swore it was my work. The porter reported me to the master—he had to—and I got two days' arrest.

The third and fourth years at the Lytzey differed little from the first two. We were sixteen and seventeen now; a few of us had incipient moustaches which they worried for hours in the hope of accelerating their growth. As before, Stas mumbled

over the textbooks, wrote calligraphic cribs for his parasites, and howled his *Pfahd Merak*. We swotted, played, complained of boredom and read Tolstoy and *Rinaldo Rinaldini*, Oscar Wilde and Conan Doyle, Dostoievsky and Nat Pinkerton, the detective (sold in the streets at twopence a dozen). I had several friends, but Tit meant more to me than the lot of them. I would have liked to have him all to myself, but he was a sociable fellow, too sociable, I thought: out of vanity he clung to the group of snobbish titled lowbrows whom he inwardly despised. "Yes, I know, I know," he would say impatiently when I remonstrated with him for his promiscuous sympathies. "They may be idiots and swine and all that, but they give me good food and good wine, so why should I keep away from them?" And, passing to a counter-attack, he would deride me for my fastidiousness and my tendency to brood. For as time passed, I brooded more and more. Life at the Lytzey seemed empty to me, our work and our amusements futile and silly. When these fits came on I would walk for hours along the corridor snapping at those who addressed me, wishing for Tit to come and pull me out of my melancholy, and at the same time feeling proud of it. My brooding, I felt, was a sign of my superiority to the others. Exactly what that superiority consisted in, I could not formulate to myself; "depth of nature" was the nearest I could manage.

"What ails you, old idiot?" Tit wondered. "*Tu veux la lune*. Of course, it would be grand if instead of nagging each other and learning that bloody trigonometry we were to converse with Socrateses and have affairs with Cleopatras. But life being what it is we must adjust ourselves to it. Look at me"—modesty was not amongst Tit's virtues. "I don't allow myself to brood, because it's silly. When I feel mouldy, as every brainy creature does now and again, I plunge into some kind of amusement, it doesn't matter what, so long as it helps to kill time . . ."

"That's just it!" I would cry. "I want more than just kill time, I want . . ." and there I would stop, for I did not know myself what I wanted, except that it had something to do with Real Life.

"I know what's the matter with you," Tit would say patronisingly, slapping me on the shoulder. "When did you last have a woman? Three years ago? Four? No wonder you're growing dotty. You'll get softening of the brain if you go on thwarting nature. Yes, it is thwarting nature, because don't you see . . ."

"But I have no money for women."

"You can borrow."

"How am I to pay it back?"

"Oh, somehow." He would make an impatient gesture.

"You can borrow from someone else; make a chain, you know. . . . In any case you have your ten roubles a month, haven't you? That's enough to have a fling now and again."

"Oh, women have nothing to do with it."

The Japanese war failed to impress us deeply, partly because we were too young, and partly because everybody in Russia had a feeling that it was too far away to matter much. It was only the swift tragedy of Tsushima when the whole Russian fleet was shot to pieces in a few hours without being able to inflict the slightest damage on the Japanese, that my patriotic imagination caught fire. The navy, I decided, was my vocation; it was incumbent upon me to help it to regain its former might and wipe out the ignominy of its defeat. Accordingly I plunged into Naval History, studied the battles of Salamis and Trafalgar, and memorised the tonnage of various countries.

Then the first Revolution broke out: demonstrations, red flags, a crop of pornographic and political magazines, smashed windows, Cossack pickets bivouacking in the streets round the bonfires. One day I drove in a sleigh through a crowd of workmen and they shouted, "Tsar's Lackey!" at me. I was badly frightened and shouted back: "Swine!" The cabman whipped his horse, and we succeeded in making good our escape. My cocked hat was crumpled, for someone had hit me on the head, and I felt a hero. Tit called me an ass. "They might have thrashed you, and it would have served you right," he said. "Don't you know that a decent man



never takes notice of the rabble?" That was how we all thought at the Lytzey: everybody who was not a Lytzeyan or at least a nobleman, was of "the rabble." Through the Tsar, God's Vicar, Russia was great and glorious (the defeat in Manchuria somehow did not count); Liberals and Socialists were scoundrels who only wanted to rob decent people; the Duma was a nasty trick invented by some ministers who had sold themselves to the Jews; therefore long live Autocracy! . . . That spoilt boys of sixteen should have thought like that is comprehensible; but how was it that even after the Japanese war thousands of grown-ups, many of them educated, cultured and intelligent people, continued thinking on these lines and would not—could not—see the stupendous inefficiency and rottenness of the régime? There is only one answer to this question: like religious beliefs or superstitions, political opinions as a rule have nothing whatever to do with intellect; they are not a product of detached thinking or of thinking at all, but a residue of mental habits grown out of half-conscious wishes, which, in turn, reflect the material interests of the wisher. That which benefits me *must* benefit my country. A mental process by no means confined to Russia. . . .

## FINLAND

AT home I was becoming more and more a stranger. I had absolutely nothing in common with Lisa, my elder sister—it would be difficult to imagine two more dissimilar beings than she and I—and Nina was too small for me. Only during the summer holidays did I get a little nearer to my family.

The holidays of a Russian boy were: one week at Christmas, one at Easter, and three unbroken months in the summer: June, July, August. This enabled every family, even of the most modest means, to take a house in the country, where life was twice as cheap as in the capital (a chicken cost 8d., a *pail* of wild strawberries 6d., etc.), and move there for the summer, leaving the breadwinner behind in the town. My family always went to Perkijärve, a tiny village in Finland, some fifty miles from Petersburg, where we rented a plain Finnish cottage.

The Finns, a northern branch of the Mongol race, cousins of the Eskimos, are a phlegmatic, taciturn people, very clean, very ugly, and absolutely honest: no one in Finland dreams of locking his doors or windows for the night. When drunk, the Finns do not kick up a row or pester people, they just stagger along with saturnine pertinacity until they collapse. They are very touchy, and it does not pay to be rude or offensive to them, for each of them wears a nasty-looking knife in his belt. Their language is like nothing on earth. Here is a sample of it taken from the Finnish translation of one of my books: "*Singonnuutta ja vahaoatoisselta näyttävää krokotiiliinpaatta*" (the last word may have something to do with a crocodile and may not). The chapter containing this melodious extract ends with the funny word *Kiiitos* (meaning Thanks), of which the four i's are pronounced on three different notes.

The country consists of one huge mossy marsh with a

multitude of lakes and patches of dry ground. The population is very sparse. The garden of our cottage, which was only 500 yards from the station, opened into a forest in which you could walk from morning till night without meeting a soul. At long intervals you came across a disused track, or a rickety shed with nothing in it, or a cow gazing forlornly into space, probably wondering why it had got so far away.

I used to spend whole days walking in the wood with a shotgun. There was hardly any game—the birds must have found the district too lonely; therefore, when once in a blue moon a hazel-hen or a partridge swooped up from under my feet, I got so excited that my gun went off before I had time to take aim, and, of course, the bird flew away unharmed. But that did not matter; shooting was a pretext and not a reason for roaming, exploring the passages across wide, dangerous-looking swamps, eating pounds of wild strawberries, bathing in solitary lakes which looked as though no human eye had ever beheld them. I lived with the wind, the trees, and the earth, I wanted nothing and thought of nothing. To my mind every youth ought to spend his holidays in that manner. It is a healthy life, an excellent antidote to the toxins produced by the communion with people. For people, even the best and the dearest of them, take about as much as they give, and there is nothing like nature to replenish our lowered vitality.

Shooting alternated with gathering mushrooms, not the variety which is used in England but the wood mushrooms. They exist in England too, but people do not pick them for fear of their poisonous imitators, which it takes a trained eye to distinguish. Every autumn my family eats twenty to forty pounds of these mushrooms which I gather on . . . Wimbledon Common, behind the windmill.

One morning in October, when but for us the little settlement was deserted, my mother saw an elk eating the last pæonies in our garden. She clapped her hands, and the huge animal rushed off in a panic, bringing down half the fence.

The curse of Finland is the horsefly (in the meadow districts), and the mosquito (in the woods). I once stayed with a friend of mine in a cottage which had a lake right in

front of it, but hot though the weather was, we only bathed once. No sooner were we in the water than a thick cloud of horseflies formed itself above our heads, and while we were dressing ourselves, which we must have done at a record speed, we were stung in dozens of places. Hay-cutting in that district had to be done after sunset. . . . The mosquitoes can be just as bad. There is no escaping them. A cigarette only helps for intermittent seconds; clove oil smeared on the skin seems to attract them; fire is of no use unless you put your head into the smoke, where you cannot breathe. Once, having ventured too far into the forest, I lost my way, and when night fell I was still miles away from home and very tired. I sat down and smoked. Then I went slapping my face with both hands. Then I ran till I could run no more. Having spent my matches I tried to light a fire by shooting point-blank at a heap of dry moss. Fenimore Cooper recommends this recipe, but I am sure he has never tried it out himself; in my case it certainly did not work. I took off my coat, wrapped it round my head, and walked on. The mosquitoes got under the coat and stung me through the shirt. A moment came when I flung myself on the ground, buried my head in the heather, and cried.

*A propos* of crying. I have cried several times in my life, at all ages and for various reasons, and I thought little of it until I came to England and became acquainted with English novels. Then I discovered that to cry is a disgrace for a man, only comparable to the loss of innocence by a girl. The Englishman, I discovered, never cries, not even at school, not even at a prep.; he just sets his teeth, jerks his chin forward in the celebrated bulldog manner, and clenches his fists with such vehemence that the knuckles grow white.\* For some time I believed the novels and felt—or rather tried to feel—ashamed of my weakness. Now I know better. So does my

\* One novelist out of three makes use of this false *cliché*, false because no special emotion or effort is required to make the knuckles grow white. Take hold of a paper knife or something, press it moderately hard for a few seconds, and that will do the trick. *Cf.* also the convention of the painters who, to show that a soldier is hit, draw him with his arms thrown up in the air, a thing which never happens in actual war.

son, who goes to a public school, and my wife, to whom her English friends talk about their husbands and brothers. Yet the fiction persists. Let's all repeat that the weather is fine, and perhaps it'll stop raining. . . .

I reach adolescence, and begin to acquire individuality, to differentiate myself within and against my environment. Its strongest influences—my mother's pampering, my privileged position in Stargard, the dissolute example of Mitya—have slid off me without leaving any trace: there was in me no suitable soil for them. On the other hand, those of my individual characteristics which begin to be revealed now—a tendency to concentrated affection, a vague yearning for intellectual activity, and a pronounced desire for independence—have nothing to do with my environment; they have grown out of myself, I was becoming what a million component forces of heredity willed me to become, except that being at the Lytzey I was to some extent infected with the Lytzeyan snobbishness. That I only cast off much later.

And here are the impressions of my boyhood which have survived to this day and therefore must be in some way representative of what I was then.

One is mushrooms. Even now, the sight of those slim brown-black or orange fungi which in Russia are called Birch or Aspen Mushrooms, and in England toadstools, sends a thrill through me fully as strong as the one I experience when reading a beautifully written passage or listening to great singing. On days when I have been gathering mushrooms I often cannot sleep for a long time, because in my imagination I go on and on picking them as I lie in bed.

The other is my friendship with Tit. If I were a painter I would be able to draw him in every detail, with his huge arrogant nose, his laughing eyes, his faultless parting, the whole of his groomed, over-groomed countenance. I can hear his voice, I remember exactly his intonation when he said in annoyance: "No, no, it's all nonsense, the point is this . . ." Or: "Oh, don't be so colossally idiotic." Or, on a different,

gentler note: "What ails you now, you old pumpkin?"

And finally there is the Elbruz as I saw it in the steppe when I was dancing round the carts. To me that vision means what the memory of childhood means to most people. I very seldom remember my parents, my home, or the Lytzey, and none of these memories evoke much emotion in me, except for the one terrible night in Finland; but then I have a special mechanism which drops an untransparent curtain over it the moment it comes to my mind. But not a day passes without my seeing the gigantic phantom of the Elbruz emerge from the grey mist, play with its unearthly colours and gradually change into other mountains, some of which I have seen and others which I only imagine—rugged crags of black basalt, or blinding white peaks sharply outlined against the deep blue of the sky. Then nostalgia seizes me, I long to get away from everything which is around me, to go to the mountains and walk and look. . . .

THE change from the secondary school to the university was hardly noticeable. We moved one floor lower, the silver of our braid was replaced by gold, and we could leave school after lectures till midnight. Since we were treated like grown-ups, we behaved better than we had done before.

Our programme was on the lines of general education. We had History, Russian and European; Law, Constitutional, Criminal, Civil and International; Sociology; Economics; and the literature of Russia, France, Germany and England. "*In der ganzen Weltliteratur gibt es nichts, was sich mit Goethe's Werk vergleichen liesse,*" declaimed Herr Tettenborn pompously as he walked up and down the classroom with his hands under the tails of his uniform coat. "*Ah, les tragédies de Corneille! Le monde n'a jamais produit rien de pareil!*" boomed M. Lacime, rolling his eyes and looking as though the next moment he were going to fight the lot of us. "*Shakespeare was undoubtedly the greatest writer that ever lived. He was born at Stratford-on-Avon . . .*" This from Mr. Webb, delivered in a steady, measured voice with a very clear, Russianised enunciation of every syllable. Mr. Webb sits stiff and erect, his face is bony, his complexion pleasantly pink, the look in his eyes benevolent; and although his hair is white I feel somehow that he is not quite grown-up. When I once called Hamlet "the Dutch Prince," he laughed till the tears streamed down his cheeks, and then he looked quite boyish. . . . I daresay we got more value out of these lectures on foreign literature than we would have by crawling at a snail's pace through the intricacies of some Latin or Greek passages, and trying to wax enthusiastic over some mummified—and spurious—virtues.

Stas had a very hard time. Since he had to learn everything by heart, and since the textbooks were much thicker than they had been at the secondary school, he now worked literally the whole day. He would read Roman Law twenty-one times,

Sociology seventeen, French Literature twelve, and so forth (he always counted it, for he had a child's passion for figures). Apart from this he continued coaching his parasites, an increasingly exasperating task. They would all agree to listen to him after supper, and yet, when the time came, it would appear that Poup had gone to the wrestling match to see the fight between Zbyschko, the Champion of Europe, and Ali, the Turkish Colossus; Galitzin and Nat Pinkerton were drawing a tight net round the Ripper of Chicago and could not be interrupted; while Boris was busy telling filthy stories to Tit. Stas would walk from one to the other, lamenting, begging, pulling them by the sleeve, promising to explain everything in two hours, one hour, half an hour; they would tell him to go to hell. His lower jaw would fall, a tormented look would come into his eyes. "*Pfahd Merak Merez*," he would intone, and then burst into Iroquois. For he had learned the Iroquois grammar in the summer, much to our dismay, since he now continually pestered us with requests to "hear him," or treated us to long-winded explanations as to why the Iroquois word for Brother was quite different from My Brother, and Our Brother was absolutely unlike either.

Tit was still my bosom friend. He was a full-fledged dandy now; he spent hours in front of the mirror brushing his hair, pulling at his coat, and forcing his tiny moustache to grow or his huge nose to slim. In the street he presented a magnificent sight with his padded chest thrown out, the haughtiness of a Louis XIV in his mien, his cocked hat set at a jaunty angle. The passers-by were so much air for him, they were all "rabble" except Guards officers and well-dressed women; on meeting the latter he would screw up his eyes, mentally undress them, and pronounce his opinion on the result of that operation. Still, we got on very well: we talked for hours on end, strolling along the corridor at the Lytzey or sitting on the sofa in Tit's room, he preaching worldly wisdom to me, telling me his amorous adventures, deriding me for my earnestness, and, in his less practical moods, arguing furiously about Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, Love and Beauty and the rest of it.



I read a lot in those university years, chiefly Russian classics and English novelists. At that time Oscar Wilde enjoyed a tremendous popularity in Russia—heaven knows why, since both sentimentality and æstheticism are utterly alien to the Russian. Kipling came a second best, which is easier to understand, since virility always appealed to the Russian Intellectuals who lacked it. Jerome K. Jerome's *Three Men in a Boat* was about as popular with us as *Alice in Wonderland* is in England: we used to quote at each other from that book. The translations were mostly atrocious, they were done by poor students at something like sixpence a printed page. One of Kipling's stories, for instance, opened with a Chinaman standing on the mantelshelf; as nothing else was mentioned about him further on, one had to assume that the poor fellow stayed in that uncomfortable position all through the story. As I discovered later, the words of the original were "a china figure."

Reading was a pleasure, but on tearing myself away from the book I always felt disappointed. After all, books were only books; they told one various things about Anna Karenina and the Hindu Babus and the English lords, but had no useful suggestion to offer as to what a Lytzeyan of eighteen or nineteen should do when fed up with the inanity of his existence. "He can drink and he can have women," said Tit. But one could not drink all the time, and after a razzle one felt even gloomier than before. As for women, "safe," non-professional mistresses seemed to exist in novels only; at any rate they did not appear on the Lytzeyan horizon. Even Tit, who had six times my allowance and twelve times my self-assurance, had never got higher than Mashka the Beast, a cocotte who once in her better days had slept with a minor grand duke. So I tried to forget all about women. But that was more and more difficult; with every year the demands of sex grew more and more insistent. I did gym in the morning, took cold douches, compelled myself not to look at the erotic pamphlets which found their way to us now and again, and at week-ends used to go for long fifteen-mile walks. It did not help, nothing helped. At night, disturbing thoughts haunted

me, visions of naked bodies, echoes of passionate whispers, the feel of hot arms round my neck, the taste of a hot mouth against mine. No effort, no concentration of mind could drive these visions away; they would teem around me for hours, till I was ready to howl with despair. . . .

There were thirty-three of us in the form. Speaking with a slight margin of error—for we freely discussed these matters between ourselves—I should say that of these thirty-three:

2 or 3 had known women before reaching the age of 14.

6 to 10 had known women between 14 and 17.

16 or so had known women between 17 and 20.

Of the remainder, three to five—of the Chicken group—kept chaste till the day of graduation, and Stas and another undeveloped boy were “out of action” altogether.

None of us had syphilis—this in spite of the proverbial Russian carelessness. About a quarter went through the other lighter disease. We used to take it in our stride; some did not even bother to apply to the doctor—they knew all there was to know about it. Only one of us (a Prince of the First Rank, i.e. with the title Your Brightness, instead of Your Serenity) went, or rather was going morally to pieces through women; he would have ended his days in prison had it not been for a discriminating German bullet finding him in 1914. With two others—Tit being one of them—women became a “bad habit” which enslaved them and had a stultifying effect on them; yet I am sure they never did anything really nasty in the name of Eros.

An average boy reaches maturity at about sixteen in Russia and the Latin countries, and eighteen in England and Scandinavia. Given the conditions of civilised life he can only get women in a promiscuous, sordid way, picking up a cheap prostitute or at best having an affair with a shop-girl. This is what boys do in France and what we did in Russia—one might almost say, were supposed to do. In England, boys are supposed to have no sex at least until graduation, with the result that they get repressed sex.

One cannot say which of these two attitudes is better and

which is worse; one can only state their respective merits and demerits.

The system of freedom obviously means medical risk, and this to my mind is the only valid argument against it. Otherwise, from the moral point of view, an early acquaintance with normal sex is rather an advantage. Those who are meant to go to the dogs through women will do so in any case, however Puritan their upbringing, however late they start on their amatory career; whilst the rest, that is to say the overwhelming majority, will acquire something positive which I can only vaguely describe as heightened responsiveness or a better understanding of women. I am the first to deplore that a positive result should grow from a sordid soil, but there it is.

The system of repression does away with the medical risk, and this, of course, is all to the good. But when repression goes too far, the youth pays for it in one of the two ways. Either his responsiveness is stunted, which in married life will not mean necessarily physical tepidity but something more dangerous—a lack of physico-emotional comprehension; or the homosexual tendency which exists in all growing boys without exception is unduly strengthened.

In Aryan Russia—I leave out her periphery inhabited by Asiatic races—homosexuality practically did not exist. There were some cases of it in the Ballet and the Court spheres (Count —dorf, the Russian Eulenburg), and that was about all. In liberal circles, our Lytzey and the aristocratic *Corps des Pages* were reputed to be hotbeds of homosexuality; but actually, in the seven years I spent at the Lytzey there were only two cases which came under that heading. One happened in my first year, the suspect being Count B., a pretty, rosy-cheeked boy of fourteen. The Comrades' Tribunal examined his case, and found him Not Guilty; the whole thing was a silly misunderstanding the details of which escape my memory. The other case concerned L., an extremely snobbish youth, related to the very best families of Russia. His crime was that of tendency rather than action: he had been caught driving in the street dressed as a woman and strongly rouged. He said he had done it for fun, and that may

have been so, but we expelled him all the same: he was an all-round rotter, and had boasted of having pawned a historical chandelier from his aunt's house. It was rumoured that before our time there had been some cases of full-blooded homosexuality, but whether that was so or not I cannot tell. What I know is that to all of us the thing was organically disgusting and rather unreal, like the Black Mass. It cannot be otherwise when the other, natural way of satisfying sex is open.

Of course, neither street love nor repression is the right solution of the problem. The Soviet solution seems to be better than either: free liaisons, with birth control, and easy marriage involving no property transactions or lasting liabilities (apart from the care of children). That this system works I see not from the official records or the writings of foreign observers (two equally unreliable sources), but from Soviet fiction which exhales a remarkably healthy sexual atmosphere. The days of unlimited sexual freedom are past long ago: both legislation and public opinion are now waging war against licentiousness: promiscuity is condemned, frequent remarrying strongly discouraged, and love—although the word itself is still taboo—has become the recognised foundation of the liaisons.

The last vacation before graduating I spent partly in Preussisch-Stargard. The Dierfelds had two children now, Paul having moved two ranks up in his Excise Office. They gave me coffee with *Elisabettorte*—Aunt Mieka remembered that I was fond of it; we talked of the old times, I learnt that Herr Lindner had been sacked, and then none of us knew what to say. It was the same with Lietke, who was in business and could only talk about turnover and book-keeping.

I stayed a month at Borkau, the estate of Wilhelm von Hertzberg, Edgar's brother. Leni had grown into a beautiful girl, so beautiful that when I looked at her I used to feel sad with the same sweet nostalgia which the memory of the Elbruz evoked in me. Elli, the tough sturdy amazon, gave me riding lessons and hugely enjoyed herself every time I fell. Kurt improvised on the piano—he could not read music but

was astoundingly musical—and spent the rest of the time eating: I cannot remember him otherwise than chewing something. Vera, a born comedienne, entertained us in the evenings with performances of nonsensical scenes and ballets while we lay on the ground and writhed with laughter. They were healthy, nice young people, they knew how to be gay without the aid of money, machines or alcohol. I fell in love with all of them, including Cognac, their collie; that month in Borkau is the happiest period in the whole of my youth. But I shall not dwell on it, for I have written too much about Germany already.

One night, on board the ship that was taking me back to Petersburg, I had a hallucination: I distinctly heard Leni and Elli call out my name from somewhere on the deck. The illusion was so vivid that I threw on my dressing-gown and rushed up. It was dawn. The grey line of the Russian shore could be seen on the horizon; the weather had broken, a drizzle was falling. . . .

## THE LYTZEY—IV

WHEN we reached the top form swords were added to our uniform, and the masters looked away when we returned from leave on unsteady legs. There was a case of theft in the lowest form; the Comrades' Tribunal found the accused guilty, and he was expelled.

The 19th of October was our Founders' Day: a gala lunch with *God Save the Tsar* sung three times to the strains of the Chevaliers Gardes orchestra; dinner at a restaurant—an orgy of comradely sentimentality; a visit to the Circus; and, to wind up, supper with a murderous Punch—everything prescribed by tradition. On that particular night the programme in the circus included performing animals. A grating of thick iron bars was erected along the circumference of the arena, quite close to the barrier; tigers and lions appeared and did their usual tricks. One of the tigers stopped opposite the front-row box in which Poup was sitting, and inadvertently let his tail stick out through the grating, whereupon Poup, who had been drinking since lunch-time, seized it with both hands and started pulling it, shouting: "Come on, Puss, don't be afraid!" I shall never forget the expression on the tiger's face. He was obviously dumbfounded; no one had ever treated him like that; he simply did not know what to do. With his head turned half-way towards us he bared his teeth and hissed softly. A silence fell on the audience; some people began to rise from their seats. Fortunately Andrey, who was sitting behind Poup, had the presence of mind to deal him a hard blow on the temple; Poup released his hold of the tail and crumpled up in his chair. It cost his parents a lot of money to hush up the incident.

Traditions! Glorious traditions! The Upper Form can walk at school with their jackets unbuttoned; the other forms cannot. On the 19th of October, when passing the orchestra,

you shout: "Whose fault is it?" handing a ten-rouble note to the conductor, whereupon his men shout back: "Pauline!" and intone an unmusical German melody. It is smart to owe four hundred roubles to your tailor, but if you have lost one rouble at cards you must pay within twenty-four hours. If you knock a man down, even without any reason, you are a hero; if he touches you or calls you names in public, you are dishonoured. And so forth. We sincerely believed that we were better and nobler through having these traditions. We should have been indignant if someone had told us that we were but playing a boys' game, not a nice game either, since its outcome was a lasting distortion of our values.

In the middle of the year Vadim, a boy in our form, was caught embezzling some funds of which he acted as treasurer. The Comrades' Tribunal was convened. Vadim pleaded guilty and the question was what to do with him. Many speeches were delivered, various high principles invoked: traditions and comradeship and honour. His fate seemed settled; yet, when it came to voting, everybody, with two exceptions, Stas and myself, voted for letting him off: it would be too cruel, they said, to ruin his career, since, if he were expelled, the Civil Service would be closed to him. This was the only occasion when I took an active part in social matters. I talked till I was hoarse; I said that Russia was rotten with thieving, and we, her upper class, had less right than anybody else to be lenient in this matter. "Yes! Yes!" seconded Stas, bobbing up and down on his chair. When a second vote gave exactly the same results as the first, I lost my temper, called them all swine, and sent the whole form to Coventry. I actually kept up that heroic pose for a month, and did not speak even to Tit, much as I missed him. But then there was the traditional banquet with the boys of the second form, to whom we were passing our swords; I drank, became mollified, and a highly emotional, alcoholic reconciliation took place.

At about that time Poup played a very cruel joke on Stas. He presented him with an ultimatum: either Stas would do what he was told, or he, Poup, would boycott him for the rest of his days. Stas cringed and whimpered; he was prepared to

do anything for Poup except that, for it was Filth and Sin and Horror. He pleaded, sang *Pfahd, Merak* a hundred times on end; Poup was implacable. And one night Stas went to a certain address with death in his heart and ten roubles in his pocket. There was great excitement amongst us; possibilities were discussed and bets made. At midnight, when we went to bed, Stas was not back yet. Next morning, however, we found him sitting as usual in the class-room and studying with his palms pressed to his temples. He looked pale and distressed and only moaned when asked questions. Of the ten roubles he returned Poup nine roubles sixty kopeks and called him a pig. Pressure was applied, moral and physical, and finally Stas came forth with the story. It appeared that after some unsatisfactory proceedings the lady in question had burst out laughing and suggested that she and Stas had better have tea instead. Stas was delighted at that change of programme; overwhelmed with gratitude he told her all about his childhood and his home, drew the various articles with which his father used to beat him, and complained of Poup's heartlessness. She pitied him, and, growing reminiscent in her turn, told him of her youth and her ruined life. She cried copiously, Stas comforted her, she fell asleep in his arms, and he sat motionless through the whole night for fear of waking her. In the morning she would not take any money from him, so he brought it back, minus twenty kopeks he had spent on a bottle of lemonade and twenty kopeks tip to the porter of the establishment.

During the final exams he gave an unforgettable performance. It started with Count Komarov, one of his parasites, a very fat and stupid boy, failing in Constitutional Law. To begin with, the Professor had caught Komarov using a crib, a slip of paper rolled up into a tiny tube and covered with Stas's microscopic writing. Komarov, who had relied on the crib, lost his bearings altogether. The ticket he had drawn was Monarchy and Republic. He shifted from foot to foot, breathed heavily and kept silent.

"Well?" said the Professor impatiently. "Start from the beginning. What is the difference between Monarchy and Republic?"



Komarov did not know the difference.

"Oh my goodness!" groaned the Professor. "Tell me this at least: is the power of the President hereditary or not?"

Komarov frowned. One could almost read the trend of his thoughts. To say "Yes" was risky; to say "No" equally risky. Then his frown smoothed out: he had found the safe solution.

"Not always," he said.

"Thank you," said the Professor, reaching for the pen.

Stas was disconsolate. The whole day long he rambled about the rooms desultorily dangling his arms and humming *Pfahd, Merak*. He got on our nerves so much that in the evening we sent for a bottle of port and by force—since he hated wine—made him drink a glass of it. Just one small glass; but coming on top of his physical exhaustion and mental distress it had a terrific effect: in half an hour's time proper D.T. set in. Stas was Chingachgook, the great Indian chief of Fenimore Cooper's epic; we were the Sioux, his enemies. Yelling Iroquois declensions, he would fling himself on us, be knocked down, rise and immediately resume his attack. "Muskrats! Jackals!" he yelled. "You flee from Chingachgook as the night flees from the sun. Take this, you dirty Huron!" A leap, a crash, and Stas was up again, crouching.

At first it was amusing, but after an hour we had enough of it. We tied Stas to his bed with a towel, but he wriggled and strained till he was blue in the face and we had to untie him. "Chingachgook is free again!" he shouted, and hurled himself at us. We fought him again and again, and finally locked him up in the closet which served as the arrest room; but he began to ram the door with his head and we had to let him out. "Chingachgook has broken his fetters!" he announced triumphantly. "Quick as an arrow he jumped at the cowardly enemy . . ."

He fought without a moment's respite; his endurance, as is often the case in D.T., was inexhaustible, superhuman. After a couple of hours of fighting we—and there were some ten of us—felt dead tired, whilst he showed no trace of fatigue. He crashed scores of times and received hundreds of blows, but they only fanned his warlike ardour. We flung him down; I

sat on him and rubbed his ears with all my might, which, as anyone can easily verify, causes excruciating pain. Stas grimaced and wriggled and talked about the post of torture, but his spirit did not give in, and the moment I got up he made a rush at me.

On and on we fought. Growing desperate, we put him in the bath, held him down and turned the cold tap on him. At first he spluttered, kicked and yelled about waterfalls and rapids; then, however, his resistance weakened and when we took him out of the bath he went limp. "Chingachgook wants to sleep," he muttered, subsiding on the wet marble floor. We left him there and went to bed. Curiously enough, during all these hours he had never once sung his *Pfahd*, *Merak*, and had not uttered one Polish swearword, but had stuck faithfully to Fenimore Cooper's vocabulary.

We were just getting into bed when the door of the bathroom opened and Stas, completely naked, tiptoed in, whispering something about the stealthy panther. Another moment, and he had hurled himself on Tit, whose bed was nearest to the door.

The battle was resumed with increased ferocity. We hit out with the intention to hurt. Chingachgook performed miracles of prowess. Pursuing the cowardly Hurons, he dived under the beds (lianas), jumped from chair to chair (rocks), swam across the floor (the Mississippi). We wrapped him up in blankets; he banged his head against the floor and we had to release him. "Swinging his deadly tomahawk, Chingachgook . . ."

The Director's flat was right under our bedroom and the din we raised woke him up. The door of the bedroom opened and His Excellency—he was Chamberlain to the Court—appeared on the threshold. We were at that moment standing round the bed under which Chingachgook was hiding, waiting for Mohawk, his greatest enemy.

"What does it all mean?" thundered His Excellency.

The answer came from under the bed.

"You stinking dog!" snarled Chingachgook, "I've got you at last . . ."

A gaunt, naked figure wriggled out from under the bed, straightened itself up and leapt. We had only just time to intercept Stas in the air, and he fell in a heap at His Excellency's feet.

His Excellency called us damn fools for not knowing what to do, and sent to the hospital for the nurse. While we held Stas's arms and nose, the nurse poured a glass of some soporific stuff into him and a few minutes later the great warrior passed away. It was three or four in the morning: the battle had raged for fully five hours.

And now comes the most unbelievable part of this truthful record. The next morning, when we got up, we found Stas sitting as usual at his desk with his palms pressed to his ears, memorising International Law for the umpteenth time. His face, blue and red with innumerable bruises, wore an expression of suffering. "Oh, it's this beastly Hague Conference!" he groaned in despair. "I can't understand what it's about!"

On glancing through the record of my Lytzey years, I find it is rather distorted through my having given undue prominence to drinking and ragging, so that one might think we did nothing else. Well, we did. We worked, we took exams, and personally I finished with distinction. But I thought it better not to describe this "normal" part of our lives for fear of boring my readers: for it is the same all the world over.

After graduating we put on our tail-coats and went in a special train to Tsarskoe Selo. In the hall of the palace the lackeys brushed us very carefully—a matter not of etiquette—since we were speckless—but of precaution. We had lunch, after which a gaudy Ethiopian took us to a state apartment where we were lined up. First an adjutant came and conversed in a whisper with our director; then an adjutant-general instructed us how to greet the Tsar and how to answer his questions; then there was a hush, and the Tsar appeared—a little man with a very thin, boy-like neck and a placid inexpressive face, the ruler over one-sixth of the earth, the

Anointed Autocrat, incarnating the might of a vast empire and the aspirations of countless millions. He went along the file, stopping before every one of us and asking exactly the same question: "What do you propose to do?" When my turn came and I said I was going into the navy, he said: "I hope you'll make a good officer"—a wish which, like all his wishes, remained unfulfilled. Poup, who was going to serve a year in the Horse Guards and then pass to the Treasury, got so flustered that he mumbled, "Serve in Your Majesty's Horse . . . Treasury." The Tsar stared at him, and—a terrible thing—never smiled: with an impassive face, he passed on to the next man in the file. "What do you propose to do?"

The ceremony over, he made an insignificant little speech and we shouted "Hurrah!" My sight was dim with ecstasy. It is strange to think now that had the puny man told me to attack a crowd, any crowd, I would have done so there and then, without a moment's hesitation, single-handed. The hypnosis of tradition. . . .

I am glad I was at the Lytzey and not at an ordinary school. The seven years I spent there with the gilded youth helped me to develop—or rather realise in myself—that quality which I value almost above all others: independence of mind. Also the Lytzey familiarised me with two important social factors: wealth and aristocracy, so that later on, when I started revaluing my values, I was not hampered by an inferiority complex.

## THE NAVY

IN 1909 the Russian Black Sea Fleet consisted, apart from a couple of cruisers and torpedo-boats, of the battleships *Panteleimon* (ex-*Potyomkin*), *St. Nicholas*, *St. George*, *Three Holy Fathers* and *Twelve Apostles*. "Eighteen altogether—the strongest and holiest navy in the world," said the wags.

As I had some doubts about my naval vocation I had taken the precaution of enlisting as a volunteer—that is to say, I could leave when I liked. The Naval Staff at Sebastopol appointed me to the *St. Nicholas*, and there I was, dressed in white trousers, singlet and jumper, with the resplendent gold badge of the Lytzey on my chest and ribbons on my cap—a jack-tar-gentleman, intoxicated with my own smartness and my romantic surroundings: the beautiful, wide panorama of Sebastopol harbour, the glorious Southern Sea, and the ship herself, with her clean white deck, her stern, purposeful lines, a metallic giant charged to the brim with the triple power of steel, muscles and discipline. It was a pleasure to feel oneself part of that accumulation of power, to stand to attention before an officer and snap out the queer-sounding "Yesst" (a corruption of the English "yes"), to heave with the men at the thick, unwieldy rope, to strain at the heavy oar of a pinnace, to rush headlong to the deck in obedience to the tremolo of the boatswain's whistle. It was a pleasure to dive into the warm sea (seventy-three degrees, if you please); to eat fantastic quantities of the famous sailors' Borshtch, than which no better is made in the Tsar's kitchen\*, and after dinner to lie down on the floor in some corner, put a coat under one's head and slide off into that bottomless sleep which is the reward of a carefree mind, night watches, scorching sun, and strenuous exercise. And then the poetry of the ceremonies! The Lord's

\* For some culinary or meta-culinary reasons, the quality of the Borshtch is in direct proportion to the size of the kettle used; therefore, although the officers had their own galley, the Borshtch they ate always came from the men's.

Prayer sung polyphonically by four hundred men with that unerring sense of rhythm and that soft richness of choral timbre in which the Russian peasantry knows no rival; the hoisting of colours—dead silence descending on the harbour, white ranks of men strung along the taffrails, and suddenly a squall of sound, bugles and whistles, thousands of heads bared with one movement, then silence again while St. Andrew's flag rises with stately dignity above the petrified sentry. "Stand easy!" But whether you work or rest, you are at ease anyhow: you have no problems, you cannot have any, for they are all solved for you beforehand; your little Ego, fussy and restive, is dissolved in the huge, steady unity fashioned out of warm metal and well-tempered manhood.

We volunteers—there were half a dozen of us—were taken through the ship and had her mechanisms explained to us; we rowed and sailed and listened to lectures on mechanics and ballistics. On Tuesdays the anchor was weighed and the *St. Nicholas*, doing a good six knots—they said she could do seven—proceeded to a desolate bay near Sebastopol where there was more room for boat and landing practice. We used to return on Fridays and be given half a day's leave. I went ashore once, and had enough of it: there were so many officers in the town that one had no time for anything but saluting them.

The *St. Nicholas*—"Auntie," as the men called her, and "The Old Galosh" in the terminology of the officers—was some thirty years old, and looked impressive with her squat turrets and six twelve-inch guns. But her appearance was deceptive. Just before my arrival the guns had been tested: the crew had been prudently sent to the lower deck and a shot was fired from the bridge by an electric cable. One shot only: then the test had to be abandoned, for the breech of the gun worked loose and the ship, unused to violent concussion, sprang a leak. I remember our first lesson in gunnery practice. We were taken into a turret, and the gunlayer showed us how to operate it. It was a tricky business. If, for instance, you wanted the turret to revolve to the left, you had first to let it go to the right, and when it had gathered speed, you quickly pulled the lever back. I was the first to try, and I

must have mistimed my movement, for instead of swinging back, the turret stuck and started trembling like a frightened horse; simultaneously a sharp hissing sound and a chorus of curses came from the ammunition-hoist below, where the imaginary shells were served from. It appeared that the feed-pipe of the hydraulic gear had burst and water was flooding the hoist. The gunlayer swore; two men, dripping wet and swearing, scrambled up from the magazine; an officer rushed in and swore too. The turret was out of action for a long time after that.

In the fo'c'sle between the two turrets stood a wooden crate, the size of a chest of drawers, with wire in lieu of the front wall and a score of live hens inside—the raw material for the officers' dinner. Three times a week the cook would come, unlock the crate, drag out half a dozen hens, and pass them on to his assistant, who deftly wrung their necks. That operation invariably attracted the men who, with humorous curiosity, watched the convulsions of the birds and then, by mistake as it were, gave cookie a push, whereupon the door of the crate would fly open, the hens would drop out in a heap and disperse about the deck, cackling frantically and slipping on the smooth surface. "Catch 'em, catch the beasts!" bellowed the men, rushing off in pursuit, laughing and thumping each other on the back. I can boast of having seen a sight such as no British mariner has beheld: the commander of a battleship beating off the attack of a hen which, mad with terror, had rushed down the narrow companion ladder just as he was ascending it. The cook got a day's cells for "negligence in the execution of his duty."

The crew had a gramophone which they played on Sundays in the afternoon. Their favourite record was the famous tenor aria from *Pagliacci*. A glow of expectation would illuminate their faces as the tenor sang; that expression gradually passed into anticipatory grins, and when it came to the agonising cry: "*Laugh, Clown, Laugh,*" the pack of them would burst into a thunderous guffaw. They held their sides, they writhed and rocked and staggered and bumped into each other. When they had calmed down and dried their tears, the same

record would be put on again, and once more the glee of expectation would suffuse their faces. Probably they had no idea what the tenor was laughing at, for the gramophone was so bad that one could not make out a single word.

We volunteers had no definite position on board the ship, but floated vaguely between the officers and the seamen. We spent most of our time with the latter, but messed in the ward-room, at the lower end of the table presided over by the Chaplain. He was a stout, slow-witted, stupid man of mujik stock. The younger officers teased him with filthy stories and asked him what sort of girls he liked best, fair or dark, and what did he think of negresses: was it true that they had the devil of a temperament?

"You mustn't say such things, gentlemen," the Chaplain would protest with a coy smirk. "My cloth forbids me to listen to such talk."

"Cloth! Ho-ho-ho! And what do you do with your cloth when you go to Matrosskaya?" (a street of bad fame).

I thought it rather bad form until one day I saw the Chaplain on the fo'c's'le surrounded by a knot of men to whom he was showing a packet of bawdy photographs. The men jostled each other and craned their necks in their eagerness to see the "pictures." But it was a different eagerness from the one which we at the Lytzey used to display on similar occasions; it had nothing cynical or shamefaced about it: what struck them most was not the obscenity of the subject but the grotesqueness of it, the incongruity of the scenes and situations. "Look at this one, look!" they would giggle admiringly, tearing the photograph out of each other's hands. "A brainy girl, that! How the devil did she think of it? Just the right wife for a fathead like you, Sidor!" Whereupon the whole crowd of them would burst into a tremendous guffaw at Sidor's expense, instantly forgetting the "pictures." "Give it back to me, children, the Commander may see us," the Chaplain would say, stretching out his hand and glancing back furtively. . . . To forestall false generalisations, I had better say that this scene is most uncharacteristic of the Russian clergy.



As the weeks passed, the glamour of naval life began to wane. I grew tired of the monotonous drill, the stultifying cult of the body and the sailors' horseplay. The volunteers, my colleagues, were a quarrelsome, ill-conditioned crowd—one of them was the worst cad I have ever met—and I kept away from them. Also we were not learning anything. The officers detailed to teach us were frankly bored with us; they shortened their lectures as much as they could, and left us to our own devices. They were fed up with everything on board the "Old Galosh," they slouched gloomily about the deck, slept more than was good for them, grumbled at the futility of their jobs, and cursed the captain. He was a very unpleasant person, a liverish old man, a disciplinarian of the pre-steam school, who never addressed the officers except to reprimand them. When one of them proposed to give the men an elementary course of lectures on Naval History, the captain said: "You'd better teach them to salute properly." When a cutter was slightly damaged coming alongside, the captain stopped sailing practice altogether: he said he did not want to have trouble with the Supply Department. The stores of the *St. Nicholas* were deficient in quantity and of very poor quality—except the food; but then the *Potyomkin* had demonstrated how easily food could be turned into High Explosive. On the other hand the captain was known to be buying house after house in Sebastopol at a rate out of all proportion to his salary. From time to time he wrote reports to the Supply Department—he had a brother there—about the devastations wrought in his cabin by a fire or sea water; the Department then sent him a new sofa or carpet, and the old articles, quite undamaged, would be loaded on a picket-boat and taken ashore to his mistress, the wife of an infantry officer. Once she came on board the *St. Nicholas*—a little, Polish woman, snub-nosed, vulgar and affected; the officers kissed her hand and called her unprintable names behind her back.

Among the officers I was on friendly terms with Lieutenant Behr, an Old Boy, several years my senior. He was six foot three, burly, good-natured, and as shy as a girl, ready to blush at the slightest provocation (the officers maintained that

his behind blushed also). He really cared for his men, in a fussy, nanny-like manner, and used to say "please" when giving an order—provided there were no officers to hear him. Once a week he got blind drunk and then he hit the men if he saw anything wrong—"cleaned their teeth" in the parlance of the Navy. The next day he would keep to his cabin and not come out to dinner: he was doing penance. In the evening his servant could be seen clandestinely taking a man to his master's cabin; the man went in, the lock clicked, and two minutes later he reappeared beaming, with a faint aroma of vodka about his mouth and a ten-rouble note in his pocket—a fortune to a sailor, the equivalent of six months' pay. "A conscientious bloke," the crew said of Behr; he was kind to them and just, even in his cups, and that took the moral sting out of his blows. I once heard two men of his watch discuss how they could provoke him into hitting them.

I also contracted a friendship of sorts with Voronov, the boatswain. He was a beauty of a man, tall, with the body of an athlete, stern, intelligent eyes and educated speech. He impressed me with his inner poise, his dignified way of talking to the officers (I noticed they felt a little uncomfortable when addressing him), and the way he treated the men. He was one of them, and yet above them, friendly but condescending, a grown-up amongst children, although he was only twenty-seven or so. They respected and feared him, called him a "serious man," and said that his fists hurt much more than Behr's.

One day a stoker came to me and asked me to teach him German. Why, I could not conceive; probably he did not know himself. Anyhow I procured a grammar, and we had lessons on the deck, with our backs against the hen-coop. It was cool on the fo'c'sle as compared with the engine-room; yet a minute after we had started, his face would be covered with beads of sweat, which freely dropped on the pages of the grammar. "Beg pardon, sir," he would say in confusion, wiping them with his sleeve. But our lessons were soon cut short: my chief told me that the captain disapproved of them. "*Yesst*," I said, saluting.

I found Voronov and asked him what was wrong with the German grammar. He gave me a slow look; there was irony in it, which I remember annoyed me. His answer was oblique.

"If I were you," he said, "I would leave Auntie at once. You're only wasting your time here. The thing to do with her would be to open the kingstons and sink her: that would save the state millions of roubles. But much do these blokes"—he nodded in the direction of the Naval Staff building—"care about people's money! Without Auntie there would be fewer reports to write, so some of them might lose their jobs, I suppose."

From him I heard the unexpurgated story of the *Potyomkin* mutiny: how the crew had complained of bad food,\* how they had thrown their officers overboard, bombarded Alupka and finally fled to Roumania. The *St. Nicholas*, on which Voronov had been serving at the time as boatswain's mate, had joined the *Potyomkin*, but her crew had abstained from any excesses: the officers had simply been put ashore and new ones elected by the men. Voronov had become their commander.

"I didn't like it at all," he said. "The *Potyomkin* had left—Auntie was too slow for her—and without the *Potyomkin* we could do nothing. You know what state our heavy guns are in; and as for the Hotchkiss guns, they wouldn't smash in an ordinary door. I said to the captain that we'd better surrender, but he wouldn't hear of it. He was a nice chap, but muddle-headed, a kind of dreamer. 'We must hold out,' he said; 'perhaps the army will join us.' Well, we did hold out for two days. The ship was as filthy as a stable, the men drank, and when I gave them an order they would send me to hell. So in the end I took a good rope and thrashed a few of them, and then they pulled themselves together for a bit.

"Then we got a message from shore that the *Three Holy Fathers* was coming from Sebastopol. 'We'll fight,' said the captain, but that was hot air—she would have sent us all to the

\* As a matter of fact, whatever the Bolshevik film may say, the food on the *Potyomkin* was quite good; but, of course, for revolutionary purposes one pretext is as good as another.

dolphins in two minutes. So one night I went to his cabin, took the ship's ensign, wrapped it round my waist under my jumper and demanded a cutter: I said I would try and find out the situation in the army. I proceeded straight to the Governor's, handed the ensign to him and said it came from me and the captain. You see, we two were sure to be shot, and I didn't want to die just for nothing, nor did I want him to die. I told the Governor that if the *St. Nicholas* were left alone, the men would soon surrender, so that the *Three Holy Fathers* had better keep clear to prevent any bloodshed. But he was a blockhead, a general. He wouldn't listen to reason, stamped his foot, and shouted that he would arrest and shoot me. I said: 'By all means shoot me, only the crew expect me back and if I don't come, they'll grow desperate and blow the whole town to pieces.' He didn't know about our guns, so he stopped yelling and let me go. Well, I came back on board, told the men some tale or other, and they surrendered the next morning."

After that, Voronov was court-martialled three times. The authorities simply did not know what to do with him: on the one hand he had been commander of a mutinous ship, on the other he and the captain had saved the ship's ensign and contributed to a bloodless liquidation of the mutiny. First he was condemned to prison, then released, then sent back to prison, and finally promoted to boatswain's rank.

"You'd better not tell the officers what I've told you," he remarked with a splendid nonchalance when he had finished his story. "It might easily get me sent to the Penal Battalion."

"Oh no, I won't," I reassured him.

His talk, of course, was propaganda, but in spite of my monarchist opinions (convictions, I called them) I did not mind it. I liked the man, I was impressed by his personality; and his opinions or even actions did not affect my personal appreciation of him. It was the same "split" attitude which I had displayed before in my relationship with Mitya and Tit; it is part of my self.

One day an elderly infantry major and myself were taken

for a trip on board a submarine—a tiny boat of a hundred tons or so. We went a few miles out to sea, and sank to the bottom. When we wanted to rise to the surface something went wrong with the pumps and for a minute or two the boat would not budge. The captain swore lustily and then broke off, stopped his nose, and cast a suspicious glance at the major and myself. For the narrow passage-way of the boat was suddenly filled with a smell such as no engines and no oil could possibly produce. I assumed an expression of injured dignity; the major's face had turned a ghastly grey. "You think we'll get up, do you?" he asked the captain in a tremulous voice. The captain measured him with an annihilating glance. "Perhaps," he said, and hurried away to the end of the corridor, his fingers still to his nose.

We volunteers went on having lessons and rowing practice, standing useless watches, eating a lot of Borshtch, and getting more and more demoralised. Once visitors came on board. I took an Englishwoman to the turrets and, as instructed, told her a string of patriotic lies about the power of the *St. Nicholas* ("Six twelve-inch guns, mind you. Six!") She had prominent teeth and wore a thick woollen jumper in spite of the heat. One evening when returning drunk from leave, Lieutenant Behr fell into the water and was fished out; the next day his saviour proudly displayed a five-rouble note to his envious comrades. Another officer, not Behr, hit a man for being late for his watch, and later, on the fo'c'sle, I heard some sullen remarks about "good old *Potyomkin*." I realised that Voronov's advice was sound, and applied for a job at the Ministry of Agriculture, choosing that Ministry for no other reason than that Tit was there. My application was granted, and in September I left the *St. Nicholas*, carrying away with myself the half-conscious thought that the men were of better stuff than the officers.

The Black Sea or the Baltic, an old ship or a new, it would have been the same anyhow. The Navy had been a false vocation for me, suggested to me by my imagination, which the report on the terrible Tsushima battle had set on fire. I was not made for barrack life, with its mechanical discipline

and its artificial codes. What I wanted was a free life in which I myself would shape events instead of letting them happen to me. And no sooner had I left the Navy than I was given a taste of that free life. The next chapter begins on the very day of my return to Petersburg, precisely as a novelist would have arranged it.



## PART TWO





## GOLDEN FREEDOM

THE day I came back to Petersburg I presented myself at the Ministry and Tit introduced me to my chief. I was going back home when at the corner of the street where I lived—I shall spare the reader as many Russian proper names as I can—I met Sergey Markov, a schoolfriend of mine. He told me that he was leaving for Germany in a week's time and that his people had just moved from across the Neva and now lived quite close to me. "Come and have a cup of tea with us," he said, and I went.

His mother was out. His father, a retired admiral, was abroad, and there were only Sergey's sisters at home: Shura, aged ten, a plump child with pouting lips and a humorous twinkle in her eyes, and Zoya whom I took to be of my age, although she was only seventeen. I thought her charming. She was of small stature, slim, with coal-black hair, a high forehead and black eyes, lustrous, very earnest eyes, so beautiful that I felt shy every time she glanced at me. I had never been at Sergey's before, and I liked the atmosphere of the house; it was easy and natural.

After tea we passed into the admiral's study, which the girls had made their reception room in his absence. We ate chocolate; I sat in a rocking chair by the table and related my naval experiences, making them all laugh at the stories about Lieutenant Behr and the bursting water-pipe, and feeling acutely conscious of Zoya's nearness. She and Shura stood behind me, on both sides of the chair, and rocked it for me, so that it swung wider and wider. "Be careful, or he'll fall," Sergey warned them. "Oh no, he won't!" drawled little Shura with comical indignation, and Zoya seconded her in the same tone: "What a preposterous idea!" Whereupon they gave an extra strong push to the chair, it turned over, and I crashed backwards head over heels to the floor.

When I scrambled out from under the admiral's desk, Zoya

and Shura were prostrate on the sofa, writhing with laughter. "His legs! Oh, his legs!" Zoya cried between her sobs, while Shura, incapable of speech, only whined on a high note, flapping her arms about her. Zoya lifted her head, glanced at me, and burst into laughter again, which made me feel confused and flattered at the same time. All earnestness had left her eyes, they sparkled with gaiety and mischief . . . I stayed with them for dinner that night.

Sergey soon went to Germany; I continued calling at the Markovs'. In those times the Russian girls of good families enjoyed very little freedom indeed; they were not supposed to be seen *à deux* with a young man, not even in the street, let alone a theatre. When Tit's sister, for instance, wanted to call on a friend of hers who lived just across the street, a maid would see her there and later on fetch her back. Mme Markova, however, had liberal views on the matter, and Zoya was allowed to do as she pleased. In good weather she and I would go for a walk along the Neva embankment or to the Islands; she was an indefatigable walker, and a dozen miles were nothing to her. In the evening we stayed in her father's study; she chatted, talked nonsense, teased me like a little girl, and discussed abstract subjects with adult seriousness. She was then passing through a period of religious search, studied the Gospel, read Tolstoy's moral treatises, and often went to church. She corresponded with Tolstoy—though she did not know him personally—and had a bunch of letters from him, all handwritten, all beginning, "My dear girl." The problem to which she continually returned both in her letters to him and her talk with me was the incompatibility of religion and what she called "the longing of the flesh." Flesh, to her mind, was sin, because it subjugated the God in man to the beast. She argued about it with a passion which surprised me. Why, I wondered, should a girl of seventeen be obsessed with a problem which to her could only have an academic interest?

In Shura's company she turned into a child. They would sit on the sofa, dangle their legs and tease each other or elaborate some absurd proposition. For instance, once they

decided to open a zoo in their flat. With terrific eagerness they proceeded to discuss that plan in all details. First of all they must have birds, and these could live in Shura's room; then a bear cub—father's study was obviously the proper place for it. No snakes, because snakes were revolting (they made faces expressive of the acme of disgust). Mother might take some lizards—she was not afraid of them—and Zoya a hare and a kangaroo, perhaps also a baby elephant. They must also have monkeys, of course, because no zoo was complete without monkeys; only what about the smell? Zoya could not stand it, nor could Shura. Then the solution dawned on them: Mademoiselle! She hardly ever stayed in her room in the daytime, and she always slept with her *Wasistas* open. They rushed off, fetched Mademoiselle, a placid, broad-shouldered, moustachioed Frenchwoman, and implored her to take the monkeys. "Don't say No, you'll break our hearts if you do," they pleaded. "*Mon Dieu! Que vous êtes bêtes,*" Mademoiselle cried with feigned indignation, her wide mouth smiling in spite of herself. They hugged her, pulled her by the sleeve, and kissed her. "Only two, Mademoiselle! *Deux tout petits macaques!*" They worked themselves up to a frenzy of enthusiasm over their imaginary cause and sank into a genuine depression when she declared that she would not have the monkeys in her room because they were *sales et dégoûtants*. "You never, never do what we ask you!"

I remember taking Zoya to see Blériot's (or was it Wright's?) first flight over Petersburg, when after three hours of mysterious preparation his machine actually rose in the air and flew a hundred yards. I remember that occasion because on the way back—it was a long way and we walked it—something happened to her. A tense, dramatic look came into her eyes, she did not listen to what I was saying, my questions remained without answer. At home, however, she became her usual self, clowning with Shura, and in the evening discussed Tolstoy's ideas on morality with me.

A few days later—I had known her for a month by then—we were walking in the Botanical Garden. She was gloomy, gloomier still than on the day of Blériot's flight; she looked as

though she were going to cry. I imagined some terrible tragedy; I longed to ask her what was the matter, but did not dare to. I pitied her and felt miserable with a strange, tense misery, as though her secret grief was mine too. Suddenly she burst out: "Oh, you *are* silly!" she cried. "Don't you see that I love you?"

My first sensation was that of the sky splitting above my head. I had never thought of love in connection with her. I had felt happy in her presence and dull on the days when I could not see her; I admired everything in her, her keen mind, her lustrous eyes, her reckless impetuous nature; but I had always thought her far above me, on a different plane, both because she was so beautiful and because she was my superior socially: she bore a great historical name. Now a flood of happiness swept over me. I told her that I had loved her all the time, since our first meeting, that she was the most wonderful girl I had ever known, the girl of my dreams; that I had never hoped, never dared to hope . . . and all the other things one says when one is twenty (or older). Holding each other by the hand we walked along the avenues of the park, which was not a park any more but a fairyland; and when the feeling of impossibility came upon me I looked into her eyes and saw that the impossible had become reality. Very clearly and forcibly I understood then that all those dull years I had behind me were but a preparation for that day, the day of my second birth.

Back at home we settled in her father's study and kissed. Hers were not the kind of kisses one might expect of a very young, well-brought-up girl; there was unrestrained passion in them, a daring and an abandon which puzzled and even frightened me. Shura peeped into the study. "Do you want anything?" Zoya asked her coldly, and Shura withdrew pouting, hurt by her indifference. We kissed again till I felt quite dizzy. "Wait a little," I begged, but she did not hear me; her eyes had an unseeing look in them, she only wanted me to kiss her and hug her.

It was the same on the following evening. I asked her to marry me, and she said Yes. We decided to marry very soon

and take a tiny flat. Very tiny it would have to be, since I had only sixty roubles a month (£6) and she had nothing at all: her family, she said, was ruined. "Money doesn't matter," she decided, and we went on kissing. Then her mood changed; she withdrew from me into the corner of the sofa and sat there with a tragic expression. "No, we can't marry!" she cried, and when I pressed her for the reason she told me. That summer she had given herself to a man, their neighbour in the country. "I don't know why I did it," she said, "I didn't love him, but he was handsome and . . . and I suppose I wanted to know what it was like. No, I'm lying, it's that cursed flesh of course. I can't struggle with it, it's stronger than me. . . . So you see, I can't marry you."

The revelation was startling indeed, but to my great surprise it failed to upset me: I felt neither jealousy nor pain. I told her that her past did not matter to me, I loved her none the less for it. She would not believe me; she said that I was bound to condemn her later on. I swore I would not, and as a matter of fact I never did: not for one moment was my love for her darkened by what she had confessed to me. The possessive instinct is presumably very weak in me.

The same evening I spoke to Mme Markova about our marriage. The lady laughed. "You are babies, both of you," she said. "How will you live? We haven't a penny, we're up to our ears in debt and can't give Zoya anything. Besides, she's far too young, not eighteen yet, and her enthusiasms are ephemeral. If I were you I would not count too much on her love, it may pass as suddenly as it began."

She would not even agree to our engagement being announced. "What for?" she said. "You can come here as often as you like, isn't that enough? Let's wait till Christmas, then we shall see more clearly." Our conversation was short and hurried, for she was going to the opera that night. She was a worldly woman.

"Yes. Perhaps she's right," said Zoya when I informed her of her mother's decision. Then she flung her arms round my neck. "Oh, what does it matter since we love each other!" That evening she cast off all restraint, she offered herself to me.

I resisted. I said that I could not deceive her mother's trust in me, that we must not start love from the wrong end. But she did not listen to me; desire had swamped her. In the subdued light of the study we fought, literally, physically. It soon became a torment to me; I implored her to calm down, and for a while she kept quiet. "You see what I'm like. You can't marry me," she said, and I retorted that I wanted a real woman and not a discarnate angel for my wife. We argued; then the fight recommenced, and only ceased when Mme Markova came back from the opera. . . . That night, at home, I realised that horror and happiness can be one and the same thing.

In my memory the weeks that followed fuse into one unbroken stretch of delirium. We must have gone for walks and chatted with Shura and discussed morality as before, but I only remember the dimly lit study, the feeling of Zoya's body against mine and the torment of the struggle. I would not give in to her. She was furious with me at times and would push me away, and say wicked words, only to repent the next moment and ask my forgiveness. For she knew that I loved her, and in her innermost heart she approved of my unyielding attitude; as she put it, I was supporting the god-like half of her against the beast. "It isn't my fault that I'm like that," she pleaded, "it's my grandmother's." And she told me about her grandmother, a famous beauty, an aristocratic courtesan, who had ruined half a dozen lives, driven a Grand Duke to suicide, and ended by being poisoned in mysterious circumstances.

It was a hard time for me. My nerves went to pieces, I began to fear darkness and could only sleep with the light on, but even so I did not fall asleep before dawn. My mother said I looked ghastly and worried; when she learned I was in love she worried even more.

As I see now, my resistance came not, as it seemed to me then, from my reluctance to deceive Mme Markova's confidence, not from any moral principles, and not even from the fear that a premature consummation of our love might prove its ruin, but from a source almost æsthetic in character. The

idea of possessing the girl I loved in a furtive, hurried manner on her father's sofa, with half of my attention engaged in watching for outside noises, repelled me. It was sordid, I could not do it any more than I could have hugged her in a tram. This explanation must be correct, because when I realised at last that I could not break her nature I decided to take a *garçonnière* and had no qualms about it. As a *garçonnière* costs money, and I had none, I went to see my godfather, a high dignitary, and asked him to lend me a hundred roubles. "What for?" he enquired.

I said I could not tell him. Being a man of the world, he guessed easily. "A woman?"

"Yes."

Against my expectations—for he was a miser—he went to his desk and opened it. "Youth without women isn't youth," he said, chuckling, "only take care not to fall in love."

"This is rather difficult," said I, "for I am in love already and propose to marry her soon."

"Marry?" he echoed, shocked. "Who is she, then?"

I told him, without betraying Zoya's name, but stressing her social position: he was a snob.

He frowned.

"You are an ass!" he said with feeling. "To marry so young, if neither of you has any money, is to court disaster. Do as you like, of course, I can't stop you from making a mess of your life . . . But if that's the case, what do you want the hundred roubles for?"

I said I could not tell him.

"Then you won't get them," he announced, and shut the desk. "I would have given them to you for a *cocotte* or a *midinette*, but since it's a question of love, you won't have a kopek from me. Whatever your plans are, whether you intend to elope with her or buy her a brooch, you must do it with what you've got or not do it at all. Just because love comes in. I don't expect you to understand me now, but you will later on." (I did.)

Just then it happened that Shura caught diphtheria and died in two days. Zoya was inconsolable; she loved Shura



more than anybody, more than her parents. I now spent all the evenings at the Markovs', sitting on the sofa with Zoya in my arms, comforting her, and finding a poignant sweetness in sharing her sorrow. When others came in we did not draw asunder, for our conscience was clear: grief had broken her passion. "That's my punishment," she used to say, and I would argue that she had done nothing wrong, that she was not responsible for having hot blood in her veins. I began to think that Shura's death might straighten out the crooked course of our love and turn it into a quieter channel.

A fortnight passed, and I again asked Mme Markova to let our engagement be announced. She hesitated.

"It looks more serious than I thought," she admitted. "Apparently Zoya really loves you. Still, let's wait a little longer. Only a month, that isn't much, is it?" She also told me that Zoya had just been left a small fortune by a relation of theirs, so that from the practical point of view our marriage had ceased to be an impossibility.

It was soon after that conversation that everything came to an end. I remember the evening in all its details. Zoya, as I entered the study, was sitting not on the sofa as usual, but in the rocking chair at her father's desk, and that, I felt at once, was a bad omen. I came up to her and stopped.

"Hullo," I said.

"Hullo."

She raised her eyes to me—she had been reading a book in a black cover—and something in them made my heart sink. She had changed overnight; the eyes that were looking at me were the eyes of a stranger.

"Sit down," she drawled. She did not bend towards me for a kiss, she did not even stretch out her hand to me, but pointed to a chair opposite her, on the other side of the desk. I sat down.

"Why are you looking at me like that?" she asked with a tinge of annoyance, her eyes growing harder. "Anything the matter?"

"No, nothing. . . . What are you reading?"

"Solovyov's *Justification of Good*."

"Don't you find it difficult?"

"Rather."

Her answers were so reluctant that I did not ask her any more questions. She sat rocking her chair and staring blankly at something above my head as if I were not there.

"You are different to-day," I ventured after a pause.

"Different?" she echoed defiantly. "Why should I not be different?"

"No reason why . . . But you are so aloof."

"You mean because I don't ask for your kisses? But you said yourself it was wrong the way we were going on, and so it is, of course. I don't see how you can complain now."

"I'm not complaining."

I waited a little, then got up. I don't think I even said good-bye; I just walked out, knowing that it was for good.

"That's silly, Gubsky!" she called after me, and by the sound of her voice I knew that she did not regret my leaving her, but was merely annoyed by the abruptness of my action.

The same day I wrote to her mother saying that since Zoya had grown tired of me I would not call any more. And that was all. I had no answer and made no attempt to see her again. I knew it would be no good.

For this short romance, which only lasted six weeks, I paid with a year of misery, that helpless, pathetic, young misery about which there is nothing to write because it is as sterile—at least while it lasts—as ordinary toothache. I worked and talked to people as in a dream: my reality began in the evening when I was alone, a reality of longing and despair, raving desire and worship. I took bromide, for otherwise I did not sleep. I do not think I dramatised myself: my misery was too real in a bodily sense.

I forgot to mention Zoya's musical talent. She must have been exceptionally gifted, for a famous teacher of singing had offered to teach her free of charge, promising to make a *prima donna* of her. She had a few lessons with him and gave it up, through sheer laziness. She never sang properly to me, but now and again I have heard her hum to herself, and the

first sound of her voice always made a cold shiver of delight run along my spine. Only once have I come across a similar timbre, and that was quite recently, when I heard Lotte Lehmann at a concert. I did not take in much of what she sang, for I was too busy keeping my tears back.

The romance with Zoya was the best thing that could have happened to me: the shock of it was strong enough to prevent me from slipping into mental stagnation, and also it acquainted me from the outset with the realities of life. In particular it put right my values of love and saved me from two perverted conceptions of it: the Nordic conception which regards love as something entirely different from passion, and the Southern conception which identifies the two.

Two years later, when I was in love with another girl, I happened to meet Zoya in the street—almost collided with her. My legs grew leaden, I stopped dead. She stopped too, and we exchanged a few clumsy remarks. When parting she said: "I'm sorry for the way I treated you. I've been punished for it, worse than you can imagine." She looked older, very thin in the face, and there was an unfamiliar hard sadness in her eyes. On coming home I sat down to tea with my mother and suddenly had a fit of sobbing.

Five years later, when I was already married, I had a long letter from her, in which she told me the story of her life. It was a dramatic story, unusually dramatic even for Russia: she had been through hell, as she might well have expected to with her temperament. I shall not go into that, however, for it would take me too far away from my subject.

## MINISTRY

ON crossing the threshold of the First Department you felt at once that it belonged to the Guards of the Petersburg bureaucracy. You knew it by the shiny parquet floor, the light, spacious reception-room, the tall, athletic figures of the messengers, the well-dressed, efficient-looking officials hurrying to and fro with grave, preoccupied expressions. No clatter of typewriters annoyed your ears, you did not see the shabby tribe of typists, you only guessed that they existed somewhere at the end of the long corridor, bent over their machines or gathering in grey, dismal clusters to whisper some petty gossip.

The section to which I was appointed consisted of the Chief, a dried-up bureaucrat with a long, bloodless face and fishlike, almost white eyes; Krustov, his assistant, a sturdy young man, with a restless look and a predisposition to panic; Tit, as magnificent in his suit and spats as he had been in the Lytzey uniform; and Karov, a tall, lean youngster with a vilely handsome face and an infuriating way of wriggling all his limbs. There were also two journalists, bearded, middle-aged men, who sat in the corner by the entrance and softly hissed across the table; they hissed because they hated each other, and they did it softly for fear of disturbing the work of their betters.

The office hours were from twelve to seven, without any break. The Chief worked all the time; when not engaged with the Vice-Director, he sat behind his glass partition and rapidly wrote long letters to the Governors of the provinces, or even longer circulars and memos for the Minister. They were typed on thick, expensive paper and we juniors read them off, numbered the pages, saw to the commas, and so on. The typescript then went to Krustov, who read it once more, muttering to himself as he did so, and put it into a brand-new file; if the paper was important he would make a

surreptitious sign of the cross over it. Then he rang the bell; a messenger appeared, clicked his heels, respectfully took the file, and with a strained expression on his face carried it to the Vice-Director. On the whole we juniors had very little to do. Tit spent most of his time attending to his appearance: brushing invisible specks off his coat and screwing up his slowly growing moustache—or chatting in a subdued voice with Karov, mostly on erotic subjects. I read the Statutes relating to Agrarian Reform, trying in vain to take them in: at first, in the autumn, it was my happiness, and later on, in the winter, my misery, which prevented me from concentrating.

After a few months of that “training” I was given my first letter to write. The Governor of some province was asking for one hundred and thirty-one roubles for moving the Land Measurement Office to a bigger house. The answer was to be in the negative, so I wrote saying that the First Department could not grant the amount required.

A look of fear appeared in Krustov’s eyes when he had read my draft.

“Oh, no, no, that won’t do!” he said. “It’s far too short. His Excellency might take it amiss.”

He took my draft and a few minutes later it came back to me, unrecognisable. Only the first words were left, “With reference to Your Excellency’s letter . . .”; the rest was new. My three lines had expanded into a whole page. The First Department did not decline His Excellency’s request; on the contrary, the First Department had no hesitation in concurring whole-heartedly with the views expounded by His Excellency in connection with the expenditure proposed. But while fully realising that it was both desirable and necessary to have the office in question moved to a more spacious residence, the First Department, to their greatest regret, had to inform His Excellency that in view of the heavy demands on the credits allotted under para. 34, the aforesaid amount could not be granted at the moment, although it might conceivably be granted later on. The draft was sent to the typists with a slip: *Urgent and Important*, came back,

was corrected and altered by Krustov, re-typed and laid before the Chief, who found it rather abrupt and added a few more auxiliary propositions. "A neat job," said Tit approvingly when he saw the finished article. "It'll take the Governor half an hour to make out what it all means."

After several months of it I felt disheartened and complained to Tit.

"*Que veux-tu?* that's their system," said Tit, shrugging his shoulders. "Their idea is to take us through a regular course of stultification so as to break us of the habit of thinking. But why worry? If they leave you alone, so much the better—you can indulge in pleasant thoughts. As I do, for instance. Instead of which you dream of an office full of enlightened philosophers like yourself and look as glum as though you had just been castrated. The chiefs don't like it, you know. They like their subordinates to be brisk and cheery of eye. Let them feel that the very sight of their bureaucratic skulls heightens your zest for living, and sooner or later their gratitude will express itself in some tangible advantage for you. Whereas now, when they see you, they ask themselves: What's this *bier-carrier* doing here?"

I could not profit by Tit's wisdom, and I began to look round for a change. There was a man in the office, Dremine by name, who interested me. He was thirty-five, handsome in a manly way, very self-possessed, with deep-set, intelligent eyes and a free, utterly unofficial manner. He had a checkered career, had been agronomist, member of a County Council, war correspondent and something else. Although he had only been a few months at the office he was already doing some independent work for the Vice-Director, writing a plan which had something to do with agronomy. Tit, who had a knack of getting on a footing of familiarity with everybody, called him *The Saviour of the Mujik*, and predicted that the peasants would soon burn candles before his photographs. Dremine laughed good-naturedly.

"Chat away, my young bureaucrat!" he would say. "As Goethe remarked: *Where thought is absent words come in.*"

"Goethe!" Tit would sneer. "You and your Goethe!"

But his repartees to Dremin were singularly weak.

I had a talk with Dremin. I told him that I was fed up with my present work, or rather the lack of it, and could he not employ me in some way? He said he could: his plan was ready, the organising work was about to begin, and he needed an assistant. He spoke to the Director and my appointment was arranged. Tit disapproved of it.

"You're making a mistake," he said. "Dremin is like a young horse: he's started well, but he'll give in long before the finish. Much safer to stick to the old favourites, the Chief and Krustov."

"You may be right," I said.

Away from the pontificating verbosity of the Petersburg offices, all over the flat expanse of the Empire, thousands of inconspicuous, unimportant people—agronomers, engineers, draftsmen and clerks—were for a ludicrously small salary doing a big national work which, had it been completed earlier, might have considerably altered the course of the Revolution. I mean Agrarian Reform.

The ownership of the peasants' land in Russia was communal. Every peasant had his land scattered in five, eight, ten and occasionally twenty and more pieces, the so-called Strips, sometimes so narrow that he could not turn a plough round without encroaching on his neighbour's land. Simply to put his foot on each of his strips he had to cover, there and back, a distance of seven, ten or fifteen miles. No wonder he could not cultivate them properly. Besides, every three or six years the commune redivided the whole of its land according to the actual size of the families, and naturally the peasant, knowing that his holding would soon be taken away from him, had no incentive to introduce on it any lasting or costly improvements.

Agrarian Reform meant the liquidation of the commune. The Government, for once in advance of the liberal County Councils, started repartitioning the peasants' land in such a way as to give every peasant one piece of land and let him own it permanently. As there were some twenty

million farms to be reshaped, the task was a tremendous one.

This is where Dremin's plan came in. He argued that it was not enough to alter the conditions of ownership; the technique of farming must be bettered as well. And that as soon as possible, in the period of transition, before the settlers had had time to transfer the old methods on to their new farms. A big body of agronomists must be created to acquaint the settlers with the four- and five-year rotation of crops, the selected seeds, the steel plough, etc. (The backward state of agriculture in Russia can be judged from the fact that the famous Black Soil, the most fertile in Europe, yielded less to the peasant than what the Prussian *Bauer* got out of his sands. Some ten per cent of peasants were still unacquainted with the plough and used the *soha* instead, a crooked, wooden stick with an iron piece at the end.)

All of a sudden I found myself very busy. Dremin and I came to the office before the others, left last, and sometimes took work home. After the enforced idleness, work was a treat, especially work with Dremin. He was an ideal chief, steady, even-tempered, with a live mind. He was an Intellectual and had written some pamphlets on Buddha and Dostoievsky; but when it came to work he put his highfalutin ideas aside and became a business man, clear-minded, critical of himself, painstakingly conscientious in details—an advanced “constitutional” bureaucrat, as the Director, himself a clever man, called him.

He taught me how to write. “Forget all about those terrible official *clichés*,” he said. “Don’t think of the style. Make your thought clear, as clear as you can, and the style will take care of itself. And remember, you have no business to say in twenty words what can be said in ten.” A piece of advice which often comes to my mind when I read modern English fiction.

Sometimes I called on him in the evenings. He had a pretty, young wife who adored him, called him her tadpole (on account of his rather large head) and lovingly rallied his stilted manner of speaking. They had children, two healthy, well-brought-up boys.



He had a philosophical system of his own, based on the idea of creativeness. Most of man's activity, he held, added nothing to life, but only served to perpetuate what was there already: Bad Infinity, as he put it. That was the worthless part of man's life; in it he was indistinguishable from the Mass (he pronounced the word with contemptuous gusto), a fraction of a unit, not a unit by himself. Value only began with the creation of new things, material or spiritual.

When I asked him what I should do to start creating he said "Seek."

"Seek what?"

"Your point of application. Find out what interests you. At present you have no idea what it is, you've let your brain grow wild and you have to begin from the beginning. Sieve your interests, choose the strongest of them and train them. It's difficult, but then no goal worth reaching is ever easy to attain."

His ideas appealed to me. Yes, I had badly neglected my intellect, it needed disciplining. I started reading, not in the same haphazard fashion as at the Lytzey, but with discrimination—good stuff only, good novels, books on Dostoevsky and Buddhism, philosophy and biology. Dremine helped me with advice and encouragement. Tit sneered. "The Saviour and his Disciple," he called us. Our preoccupation with abstract matters, he predicted, would lead us to brain fever and sexual impotence; as for Dremine's plan, that would no doubt come in useful for lighting stoves in the winter. The greater was his indignation when after a year or so Dremine was made Acting Chief of a new section, and I, his assistant, got a rise. Tit felt injured. His Chief, he declared, was a bloody codfish, Krustov a toady, and Karov something much worse than that; Tit was fed up with the damn lot of them and must find another job. But when I suggested that he come over to us he grew magnificently contemptuous. "What? To be at the office at eleven? Good God! Whom do you take me for?"

## THE VOLGA

IN the autumn of that year the Vice-Director of our Department took me as his secretary to the Agricultural Congress at Saratov on the Lower Volga. The Congress lasted a week. For seven hours a day agronomists, officials of the Ministry, and members of the County Councils spoke with that abundance of gestures and that disregard for sequence or time which are characteristic of the Russian speech; they quoted rows of statistics which were not to the point, jumped from one subject to another, expatiated on petty local squabbles, flew off into rhetoric, and ended with an ineffective: "That's what I wanted to say."

The Congress over, an informal party was organised at the Alcazar, a night club. It was a dull party: everyone talked shop and remembered what he ought to have said at the meetings but had not said. After the supper I went into a box adjacent to the room and looked down on the stage, wondering whether I could slip back to my hotel and go to bed.

There was an interval in the performance. The box being close to the stage, I could see the opposite wing in which a girl stood awaiting her turn. She was pretty, with fine nervous features, sad dark eyes, and a delicate chin. From time to time she bent down, picked up a glass of what looked like red wine, sipped from it, put it back and crossed herself. As the conductor raised his baton she put on a ready-made smile and skipped on to the stage, where she began to sing in a tiny voice, helped out by a good deal of high kicking.

Some members of the party joined me in the box. "Not bad," they decided, and sent for her. She came. Seen closely, she looked prettier still. She was shy and distant at first, but as she drank, her shyness wore off, she started chatting and laughing on the special guttural note calculated

to provoke the male. Suddenly her animation vanished. "I'm drunk, I've a headache," she said, and announced that she was going home. One of the officials rose obviously with a view to accompanying her. Since I disliked his face I came up to her and said: "May I see you off?"

She screwed up her eyes as she scrutinised me.

"Why should you? I can go by myself," she said, but changed her mind. "All right, let's go then." And we left the club.

Outside, I took a cab and told the driver to go to the Hotel *Volga* where she was staying.

"No, let's drive about first," she said. "It's such a fine night. Look at the stars, they're so big one can see they're round."

She was quite sober now: she said she had only pretended to be drunk to get away from the boring company. "What's your name?" she asked.

"Nikolai. And yours?"

"Margot."

I did not like calling her that, it was an artificial, vulgar name, so I asked her full name.

"Margarita Petrovna," she said. "Funny, nobody's called me that for years, not since I ran away from home. I'm of good family, you know, I really am. My father was a major and a nobleman, and I went to a grammar school."

"Why did you run away from home?"

It was an ordinary story: a handsome actor—a promise of marriage—another girl whisking off the actor—Margot left to her own devices. "And here I am," she wound up, "drinking and passing from hand to hand. It's a beastly life, that's why I drink. Not that I feel remorse or anything of the kind; that's all rubbish. And I don't mind having lost my home: father was a drunkard, and life at home was hell. But men are such beasts, all of them, all."

We were driving through the suburbs. The streets, sparsely lit by kerosene lamps, were deserted, the cabman dozed, the horse jogged along at a meditative trot. Suddenly from behind a corner a group of some eight

hooligans\* rushed forward and barred our way, one of them seizing the bridle. Their leader came up to us and took his cap off. He was a man of forty, with features which would have been handsome but for that flabbiness which denotes the inveterate drunkard.

"Our profound respects to the lady and the gentleman," he declaimed in the voice of a tragedian and executed a flourish with his torn cap. "Would not the gentleman kindly contribute towards the comfort of our humble party?"

"Get away!" I said. "Cabman, drive on!"

The cabman stirred uneasily on his seat. The leader of the gang smiled an unpleasant smile. At this juncture Margot intervened.

"Don't be silly," she said to me crossly. "Why not give them something? They are men like you. Or shall I . . . ?" She opened her bag.

By that time my original courage had waned: I realised that I was in a tight corner, and in my heart I was glad of her intercession. "All right," I said, and generously presented the ex-actor with a five-rouble note.

He bowed low.

"Thank you, kind sir. The best of luck to you in this valley of tears." He came close to me and fixed me with a queer look of swagger, misery and arrogance. "Permit me to observe, kind sir, that it doesn't pay to be harsh with poor people, not in the long run. Take this hint from one who of old used to drive like Your Grace in cabs with lovely ladies . . . Let go!" he ordered the man at the bridle, and we drove off pursued by a loud Hurrah.

"He had a good face, that man," said Margot.

"I hope the police will clap him into jail," I retorted.

"Why? He hasn't done you much harm, has he?" she remarked philosophically. "Oh, quick, a wish!" For a star was falling. "My contract in Warsaw . . . Damn, it's too late!"

\* This is one of the very few foreign words which were adopted in one year—1905—by the whole of Russia, urban and rural alike. It is now used in the Soviet Criminal Code.

At the door of the hotel she invited me to come in with her for a minute, which I did. Her room was in a state of utter chaos—shoes, underclothing, boxes and paper were lying about all over the floor and the chairs. It was no use tidying the mess, she said, because she might leave any day: she was only waiting for a telegram from Warsaw, where she had been promised an engagement.

"Oh, I'm tired," she said, and in a quiet, matter-of-fact way began to undress. When she was in her chemise she came up to me and stopped in a provoking attitude, screwing up her eyes. I was sitting in an armchair eating chocolate.

"Well?" she asked with a smile.

"Well?" I echoed.

"You *are* a funny one."

"Why?"

"Here is a pretty woman undressing before you, and you sit like an Egyptian mummy. You might at least compliment me on my figure; they say it's rather good." She gathered her chemise tighter round her to display the lines of her chest and hips. Her figure was beautiful indeed—even I could see that, who have no eye for lines. But her tone jarred on me, it was out of keeping with the refinement of her features.

"Don't talk like that," I said.

"And why not?"

"Because it isn't your style."

She made a grimace of annoyance. "What the hell do you know about my style?" she snapped, went to bed and slipped between the sheets.

After a while she told me to come nearer. We ate more chocolate and she talked about her profession. The manager of the Alcazar was a swine: he had tried to get off with her, and, having failed, had given her best number to another girl, a nasty cat who could not sing for her life. Before Saratov, Margot had been to Kazan, where a Dragoon Lieutenant had fallen in love with her and had wanted to marry her, but she had refused because he was poor and she was used to spending a lot of money. Instead, she had managed to skin the Vice-Governor for 1000 roubles; that was why she had

been able to keep herself "clean" for a month at Saratov. Her money was gone now, it was dresses that ate most, the dresses and the hotel bills. At the hotels, as soon as they saw who she was, they charged her double for everything.

She spoke in tones of irritation, an ugly crease forming itself round the corners of her sensitive well-cut mouth. Then she fell asleep, and the ugly crease disappeared; she looked really beautiful, with a soft girlish beauty. I finished what was left of the chocolate, kissed her on the forehead without waking her, and left.

It was agreed between us that I would call on her in the afternoon of the following day. But at lunch-time I got a note from her to the effect that she was going to Warsaw by the six o'clock train: the expected telegram had arrived. Could I not see her off at the station?

At six I was at the station and found her in a first-class compartment. I gave her a box of sweets and received an absent-minded "Thank you." She was worried about her luggage: the idiot of a porter had disappeared with her suitcase and, of course, she would never see it again; every minute she ran to the window to look out for him. When he came at last, she swore at him profusely and gave him a rouble. Then one of her cases fell off the net; I helped her to collect its contents and put them back. The engine whistled.

"Go now!" she fussed. "Thank you for seeing me off. Good-bye."

"There is no hurry," I said and kissed her hand.

"That was nice of you," she said in a different voice, giving me a look which made me feel troubled. I stood in indecision.

"You silly baby!" she laughed. And, throwing her arms round my neck, she pressed her whole body to mine and kissed me on the mouth. "Now go quickly. Oh, the train is moving. Quick!"

I jumped out, left the station and took a tram back to the town. But I did not get there, for half-way down something happened to me. It was as though someone had dealt me a blow on the head, a blow which stunned my ordinary consciousness and called up the memory of Margot: I

suddenly saw her face quite close to me, a tender girlish face with heavy eyelids drooping over her darkened eyes; I remembered the pressure of her body against mine, and the curves of her body as it shimmered through the transparent silk of her chemise: her slender legs, her rounded hips . . .

I jumped off the tram, rushed to the nearest post office and wrote a long telegram, addressing it to Margot in the train. It was so long that the clerk asked me incredulously: "Do you want all this to be telegraphed?" and I said irritably: "Yes, of course." I paid, left the post office and walked away from the town.

Soon I was in the country. A dog appeared from behind a fence and barked furiously at me. After ascertaining that nobody could see me I threw a stone at him; it must have been a direct hit, for there was an outburst of yelping, the dog ran away, and I felt as elated as when in Finland I happened to shoot a partridge.

I went across the fields towards the hills overlooking the Volga. The Black Soil, softened by the recent rains, stuck to my shoes in big heavy clumps. I walked as fast as I could, enjoying the strain of my muscles and thinking of nothing. Dusk was coming on. "I must be on the top before sunset," I decided, and ran. Panting, I reached the top just as a narrow sector of the sun dipped behind the horizon; somehow I knew then that Margot would wait for me in Moscow as I had asked her to do in my long telegram, and I burst out into a jubilant song.

It was late when I came back to the hotel. After having changed my shoes I went to see my chief and asked his permission to leave on the following day.

"Why? Has anything happened?" he asked.

To my surprise I felt weak all over and sank into a chair.

"I'm sorry, sir, I can't tell you the reason," I said. "But I must go to-morrow, I simply have to."

I would have gone in any case, even if he had not given me permission, even if it meant a row. But he was a kind man, and I think he guessed what was wrong with me: he

smiled and let me go. "Don't get into mischief," were his parting words.

The following morning I left for Moscow. In the train I spent the whole day standing on the open platform of the carriage, gazing down at the two lines of rails rushing under me. They hypnotised me, they had a stunning effect on my mind, and helped me to suppress the unbearable stress of expectation. And all the time as I looked at them I felt like jumping down. In the evening a conductor came, made me go into the carriage and locked the door to the platform: one's foot might easily slip, he said.

In the morning I was in Moscow at the hotel where Margot was staying (it was the Metropole, so familiar to English tourists). I found her still in bed. I knelt down by her bedside, kissed her hands, her shoulders, her throat. "Don't be so mad," she said, with her guttural laugh . . .

The next three days passed in a whirl. I remember kicking up a row *à propos* of a broken window in our room; waiting hours for Margot outside some cabarets while she was trying to coax the managers into giving her an engagement for the winter; going from shop to shop in vain search for something called *Fil de Perse*; ordering champagne and leaving it untouched because I felt drunk enough without it. I was driving in a cab along the main street of Moscow—Tverskaia—with four or five round hat-boxes at my feet; at a sharp turn the lot of them dropped out and rolled merrily along the pavement, to the great amusement of the passers-by. I also remember the torment of hunger on my journey back to Petersburg: it lasted the whole day, and I had literally not a kopek in my pocket. But my heart was lighter than my purse, and I did not care whether I ever saw Margot again or not.



A YEAR passed. I worked, listened to Dremín's high-flown talk, and read a great deal. Reading became a passion with me; I spent all my free time poring over books, and the more intellectual they were the more I enjoyed them. I was becoming top-heavy, which, however, did not suit me; and *therefore*—since chance is but a by-product of character—I had to meet Tavrov.

One evening Dremín was giving a party. When I arrived, a dozen people were gathered in his dining-room listening to an odd-looking man of forty-five, of medium height, with soft features, a hooked nose, long fair hair combed back, and very kind, expressive eyes. He stood gesticulating fiercely with a tea-spoon, and talking fast, with exaggerated fervour, his eyes laughing, his voice vibrating with an intense earnestness. The subject of his speech was an earthquake on the Isle of Martinique. All the inhabitants of the island had been killed by the ruthless lava, all except a negro youngster, Friday by name. "What am I to do in view of this cataclysm?" moaned Friday as he slouched despondently amidst the desolation, but the dry tropical sky gave him no answer. He enquired of the darting lizards, but the lizards only stared at him uncomprehendingly with their protruding eyes. One morning Herr Immanuel Kant put his philosophical foot on the island, and: "What am I to do?" asked the lonely Friday. But Immanuel heard him not. "This is an empty spot, a negation of true being," said Immanuel, and with his complete works under his arm climbed back into the canoe that had brought him. Artists came and composed sonnets in Pluto's honour; merchants came to collect mother-of-pearl; scientists measured the dimensions of the island in metres and even decimetres. They did not mind Friday giving them a hand with their luggage, but when he propounded his

question they looked away, for they did not know what to say to him. And there was a great storm which flung Robinson on to the island and smashed his canoe into smithereens on the reefs. "*J'y suis, j'y reste,*" said the poor man, and proceeded to act accordingly. Together with Friday he built a hut, together they gathered wrinkly dates and other varieties of dicotyledonous fruit, deceived the slow wisdom of the tortoises and baked ostrich eggs in the silky sands. With time a staunch friendship grew between them, and if they did not address each other in the second person singular, that was only because such a thing does not exist in English, which was the language they used. One night a ship passed close to the island, and Robinson started packing in a hurry, for his heart was still pining for the luxurious meadows of his beloved Sheffield. But the ship failed to notice his signals and sailed away. Whereupon Friday slapped his swarthy forehead and cried "Eureka!" which in his dialect meant: "At last I've discovered the answer to the question which has been tormenting me for many—many years!"

Seizing his cup of tea, the speaker jumped on his chair. "Beautiful is the ocean and mighty the volcano!" he declaimed, frantically waving the spoon above his head. "But mightier and more beautiful than either is the power of personal relationships, for they produce life where desolation lay disgusted at its own sight, and transform the fiction Man into a granite reality. Let us drink therefore to the conflict of attraction and repulsion, the elation of a soul discovering another soul, the adventure of love and parting, and to your health, ladies and gentlemen." He drained his cup of tea, cleared his throat as people do after vodka, and jumped off the chair. The company clapped their hands and laughed; he laughed with them, loudly, openly, at himself.

We were introduced: Gubsky—Tavrov. "Oh, how do you do?" he said getting up and bowing with old-fashioned ceremoniousness. Then point-blank, with a look of intense scrutiny in his kind blue eyes: "Ah, but I know you already!" he cried. "Your real name is Mr. Robinson, isn't it?" But the next moment, noticing my embarrassment, he grew

confused. "I beg your pardon, I didn't mean it," he said. "It just slipped off my tongue because I was talking so much rubbish. Please forgive me." He was not joking any more, he was genuinely contrite. I muttered that it was quite all right, and hastened to take cover behind the samovar.

"Who is he?" I asked Dremine in a whisper, and when he challenged me to guess: "An artist?"

"No."

"A poet?"

"No."

"A novelist? A composer?"

"No. He's Chief Clerk to the Senate. An Excellency, if you please. You didn't expect that, did you?" he asked, enjoying my surprise and glancing at Tavrov with proprietary pride. "He has even the right to confiscate the boots of his assistants for twenty-four hours. He really has; it's one of those archaic regulations, you know, calculated to prevent the scribes from slipping out to a pub. . . . I understand he's one of the biggest experts on Civil Law in the country. It's amazing how he manages to combine dry jurisprudence with that dishevelled fantasy of his."

Tavrov in the meantime was talking at full speed, mixing ordinary jokes—but in his emphatic rendering they somehow ceased to sound ordinary—with philosophical thrusts, his mobile features alive with an animation which had something childish in it, his voice now subdued and intimate, now vibrating with lyrical feeling, now resounding with the pseudo-thunder of the grotesque. When after tea the company had moved over to the drawing-room, a young woman took hold of him; they settled apart in a corner, she talked and he listened, his eyes wide with naïve wonder. "What does he find in that silly goose?" I thought, for her face seemed unintelligent to me. But the company soon separated them and made Tavrov talk again. He delivered a lecture on the meaning of Cosmetics in the cosmos, gave a brilliant parody of Dremine's theories, quoted an inspired passage from Zarathustra, made an idiotic pun which made everyone rock with laughter; then, glancing at the clock, he broke off

abruptly. He had to go, he said in a crestfallen voice, work was waiting for him, a lot of work.

I contrived to go out with him. In spite of the warm weather—it was October—he had a fur coat on; its collar was very shabby indeed.

“Can you explain this to me?” he asked. “There is a convention—only amongst civilised people, mind you—that when you meet a stranger you mustn’t be sincere, but must put on the air of impregnability, aloofness, indifference. Now why is that? Is it the survival of those old times when a man on seeing another hid behind a tree as cougars do even now in the jungle? Or is it a coquettish challenge: ‘Try to solve my riddle, O Œdipus?’”

I did not know what to say, and he answered his question himself:

“No, it must be simply laziness. Why the devil, says the man to himself, should I bother to start a relationship with a bloke I don’t know from Adam? For it is a bother: I shall have to observe him, make guesses, approach him in this way and that, and in the end he may turn out to be a sharper or something. No, it’s safer to put on a plaster-of-Paris-mask meaning: ‘Don’t you expect to see my real face; and in fact I’m not interested in seeing yours.’”

When he came abreast of a cab he stopped.

“Please excuse me, dear Mr. Gubsky,” he said in his emphatic manner, “but I must take leave of you. There’s a heap of files I have to finish to-night.” And as though he had read my thought: “Yes, do call one day, certainly do. I’m mostly at home, unless I’m out. And if I’m too busy I’ll tell you so without equivocation.”

As he was settling himself in the cab: “Good-bye, Mr. Robinson!” he called out in a different, cheerful voice. “If you want to find Friday, it’s quite easy. He’s waiting for you on the uninhabited island, there—there—there—there.” With a flourish he pointed in all four directions, then addressing the cabman: “Would you kindly set your quadruped in motion?”

I saw him again and again, at the Dremins', and at his place. He lived student-like, in a very modest, medium-sized furnished room. No matter when I called, I found him working at his blue files—similar to those my father used to get—either sitting in a decrepit leather chair (sideways, for a sharp spring was sticking out in the middle), or half lying on his bed. At home he wore a disreputable overcoat in lieu of a dressing gown; it was shabbier even than his fur coat, so that he could not possibly use it for going out; the gentlest horses, he said, reared at the sight of it. He had no suit at all, only a morning coat and tails, both from a first-class tailor. He possessed neither clock nor watch, and his ideas of time were vague: at two in the afternoon I sometimes found him still in bed, under the impression that it was morning. On his night table there always stood a jug of boiled milk and a loaf of white bread: his breakfast, lunch and supper. Not that he was on a diet; simply he could not be bothered to go out for a proper meal. Above his pillow there hung, suspended on a system of strings, a broom-handle with its nose pointing against the button of the bell, the Catapult, as he called it, his own invention, of which he was inordinately proud. "It gives me a feeling of luxury and power," he said. "While lying comfortably in bed I give this rod a gentle push, and the trick is done; in rushes the slave to take my orders. Incidentally it saves a lot of energy: five thousand calories, I should say, and perhaps six.

"Ah, Mr. Robinson!" he would cry when I came in. "Be welcome on this uninhabited island. Sit down in the shade of this resplendent tamarisk"—meaning the bookshelf—"and let's have a Roman orgy with China tea."

He would ring the bell with the Catapult and tell the maid to bring us tea, spicing his order with jokes. "See to it, O Dulcinea," he would say, "that there are no cockroaches in the teapot. I know you have a soft spot for cockroaches, as their moustaches remind you of your dear friend, the reckless Guardsman, but that's no reason why I should feed on these invertebrates. I'm delicately built, I must consume nothing but the most refined food."

"Heee," she would giggle. "I don't know what you're talking about, Sir."

"Nor do I, O Dulcinea. And why should I? Why, pray? Is the nightingale ever aware of the sweet melodies it pours out into the embalmed stillness of the night? No, begad, it isn't! . . . But I've had enough of your insipid chat. For heaven's sake, go, and let's have tea! My worthy visitor must urgently tamper with the mysteries of the universe."

As a matter of fact it was he who tampered with them; I only listened and asked questions. His philosophy was quite a different affair from Dremine's. It was based on the idea that personal relationships constituted the essence and sense of human existence. Man, he argued, did not exist by himself; he was but a fiction, like the atom of the physicist, a fiction which we resorted to because our senses were not developed enough to grasp directly the reality of personal relationships, just as the untrained mind cannot conceive matter not as a collection of hard atoms but as energetic tension. Where there was no tension and no relationship between two human beings, there was no life, they were both non-existent. They grew half-alive through impersonal relationships, such as were formed around games or work or business; and they came fully to life only when, and for so long as, there was a current of personal intercourse between them: the attraction of love or hatred, sexual or non-sexual. It is a system frightfully difficult to defend, but his power of argument was such that I have never known Dremine or anyone else catch him out in an inconsistency.

Historical evolution he interpreted as the growth of the personal element in man's relationships, a thesis which he would illustrate with references to the Greece of Plato, or to Christ as the genius of intimate contact in the formalised world of Judaism. Tavrov was almost the only man of that period who knew that Russia was on the brink of a revolution: the lop-sided Russian civilisation, he said, had dug an abyss between the upper class and the lower, and had destroyed the possibility of mutual understanding. When—although that happened a couple of years later—I was offered the post

of Assistant Secretary to the Minister, a post which assured me a brilliant career, Tavrov, to whom I turned for advice, said to me: "Do you know the people there? Are you sure they'll like you and you'll like them? No, you aren't? Well, then, since you get on so well with Dremin, why leave him?" Which, I still believe, was the wisest advice in the circumstances.

He would explain to me the application of his theory to everyday life. First of all, he said, I must break myself of the habit of criticising people. If A was not intelligent, if B cheated at cards a little, C was abrupt and harsh in his manner—what of it? Our judgment of people was illusory anyhow, since they were but so many fictions, so many potential vessels of life. Our task was not to compute their non-existent merits and demerits, but to call them to life by establishing personal relationships with them. That was all that mattered, both philosophically, for thus life was created in a vacuum, and practically, for intimate intercourse with people was the only thing capable of giving man a solid lasting satisfaction.

He worked very hard, whole days on end; he might not leave his room for a week. "Surely that is too much," I remarked once. "Why not ask your Senators to pass some of your work to someone else?"

His reply was characteristic. "Oh no, I can't do that!" he said, almost with fright. "They're used to me, so how can I force a stranger on them? Twelve hours or ten or eight—what does it matter? That's arithmetic, and I hate arithmetic, it's so revoltingly impersonal."

Sometimes the fancy took him to go out for a walk, and we would roam aimlessly about the streets. The crowd, the ordinary drab crowd, filled him with naïve wonder. He would draw my attention to this or that face, man's or woman's; they all seemed to him profoundly interesting and mysterious. Once or twice some prostitutes accosted us. He was out of his depth with them. He would pay them some elaborate compliment and become deflated when they resorted to their usual formula: "Wouldn't you like a virgin, darling?" He

would hide behind me then, mumble to himself, and, after they had gone, he would say with a look of painful puzzlement in his eyes: "Strange creatures, very strange. Why can't they keep sincere? Whence this assumed cynicism?" He was pathetic on these occasions and I liked him the better for it.

Beneath his tempestuous gaiety and his youthful enthusiasms there was a layer of permanent sadness. It became apparent at the oddest moments; after a grotesque speech or a shower of jokes he would suddenly close up and sit huddled in his chair, hardly listening to my questions, looking ten years older. At first I thought the reason for these fits of depression was physical: he had a weak heart, and when the attacks came, he had to stay in bed for a day or two. But as I discovered later on, it was life, and not heart.



## LYDIA AND KATYA

TAVROV and Dremin were my superiors; the Surins, just friends. Their family consisted of the father, a well-known engineer and an ardent Liberal; his wife, a strict and stiff-looking but essentially very kind and friendly woman; a son of my own age, and two daughters, one of them so nice and pretty that I often wanted to fall in love with her. Somehow this never happened.

The Surins were hospitable in the grand Russian manner. One could come to them at any time of the day and stay as long as one liked; if the spare room were occupied, one would be put up on a sofa in the study, and if that were occupied too, somewhere on a mattress. We went skiing or walked on the wide Neva Embankment, played the pianola and talked nonsense. The Surins' home was, so to speak, the continuation of my German environment.

It was at their house that I met Lydia Tomlin. She was neither beautiful nor pretty, but I liked her grey eyes, the serious, attentive look in them, and the way she dressed *à l'anglaise*, which suited her thin, erect figure, her narrow, thin face, and the peculiar angular elegance of her movements.

That evening there was a company of young people, mostly students. In their presence I felt, as usual, tongue-tied and bored, so that I did not talk to her. When the time came to leave, it appeared that she and I had to go in the same direction, so I volunteered to see her home.

We got into a sleigh and tried to make conversation, that is to say we exchanged a few platitudes followed by long intervals. The performance was so poor that finally I laughed aloud.

"Why are you laughing?" she asked. From the sound of her voice I knew that she knew the answer, so I said frankly:

"Because I feel so silly trying to entertain you without the remotest idea how to set about it."

"Why try at all?" she said. "You needn't if you aren't in the mood."

The simple and sincere way in which she said this put me at ease with her. Here, for a change, was a girl who knew better than to chatter parrot-like all the time as most of the Surins' friends did! My shyness vanished, and I began to talk—probably on the subject of conventions: Tavrov had just held a marvellous discourse on the subject a few days before. She listened, and the look of interest in her serious grey eyes spurred me on to an eloquence of which I had not thought myself capable. "Ah, your students can't talk like that!" I thought with satisfaction.

I called on her next Sunday, and continued calling regularly once a week. Lydia lived with her father, a little man with a grim bulldog face which became uncommonly attractive once you got used to it; and Koko, her younger brother, a good musician. We would play ping-pong, and then go to her study, a little room furnished with unobtrusive elegance, with English etchings on the walls, a huge mahogany bookshelf, and queerly embroidered cushions on the sofa. She would sit down, tucking her legs up under her, and I would light a cigarette and sail forth into the intellectual seas charted for me by my mentors. At that time abstract ideas were as real to me as the ground beneath my feet, and the attentive look of my listener imbued them with an additional vitality. I would expatiate on personal relationships and Creativeness, Dostoevsky and the Destination of Man—second-hand themes, borrowed from Dremine, Tavrov and the books, but served with a genuine fervour. When she could not follow my involved speech she would frown and ask me to "say it again." She herself spoke very little, not from shyness, and not because she did not know how to express herself, but because her mind was not formed yet. She was only nineteen, had not read much and had not been to the University; but on the other hand she had that sixth sense which is more precious—and rarer—than erudition: the sense of value.

When disagreeing with me she would say: "No, that's wrong somehow," and as often as not I found that I had indeed gone off the right track. Time passed surprisingly quickly when I was with her. "An interesting girl," I said to myself, meaning thereby: "Now I too have a disciple." And I felt annoyed when Mme Surin asked me how my flirtation with Lydia was getting on. Flirtation indeed! Of course I was not flirting, nothing so banal! I was Creating a Personal Relationship in Tavrov's best tradition, and for a first attempt I was not doing so badly: we two were managing to interest each other without the aid of artificial stimulants such as dancing or noisy company . . . I should have been greatly surprised if someone had told me then that my attitude was artificial through and through.

Tavrov used to keep his money in a hatbox stowed away on the very top of his bookshelf, so that to get at it one had to shift the table across the whole length of the room and climb on it. When I asked him whether he did it for fear of burglars he laughed.

"No, not burglars; I'm hiding it from myself," he said. "You see, I hate these climbing exercises, so the money is safe up there. I find that as soon as I take it down, it goes. Disappears, evaporates. It may have something to do with the difference in atmospheric pressure."

But I knew that atmospheric pressure had nothing to do with it. He fed on boiled milk and white bread, but he also gave princely tips to the porters of every house he called at. He haggled with the cabmen—it was a tradition in Petersburg for them to ask treble fare and then gradually work their way down to a normal figure—but when it came to paying he gave them twice the amount agreed upon. I have seen him present Mme Dremin with a huge bouquet which must have cost several pounds, and it was not her birthday either: simply he had been passing a flower shop and could not resist the temptation of stepping in. And yet there was something in his finances which puzzled me. His salary, I reckoned, must be at least £600 a year (the salaries at the

Senate were notoriously low, even for Russia) and on that, even with his profligacy, he ought to live considerably better than he did.

"I have a suspicion," I said to him once, "that you burn your money. Just for fun, to hear the notes crackle in the flames."

And then I had the surprise of my life. "Oh no," he said, "you forget that I have a wife to keep."

"A wife?" I cried. "Are you married? I'd no idea!"

He was almost as surprised as myself. "No? How strange! I took it for granted that Dremin had told you."

"No, never. Is your wife away?"

"In a sense. You see, she's in a private asylum, which is very expensive—it eats up half of my salary. She's mad, you know, and the doctors say she'll never recover, never. . . . Yes, and I had a boy once, he died when he was two. It's all sad, very sad."

He hung his head and muttered something. Then he shook himself, went to the bookshelf, took the New Testament and read aloud from St. John the story of the Samaritan woman:

"Jesus saith unto her, Go, call thy husband, and come hither.

"The woman answered and said, I have no husband. Jesus said unto her, Thou hast well said, I have no husband:

"For thou hast had five husbands; and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband: in that saidst thou truly."

"It's my favourite passage," he said, in a voice charged with emotion. "An astonishing scene! Do you perceive how He approaches the woman? He doesn't blame her for living in sin, nor does He treat her merely as a prospective follower of His; she is just a human being for Him, a woman who has had her fill of life; and so He talks to her not about the Kingdom of Heaven or the salvation of her soul, but about what is nearest to her, her married life. They've only just met, and at once He enters into a personal relationship with

her. What an amazing mind He must have had to bear within Himself those blinding visions and at the same time to be capable of sharing the intimate troubles and worries of the first comer! Sometimes I think Dostoievsky is right: if He had not been, the whole of our planet would have no sense . . .”

An extraordinary man. . . . In the middle of a conversation he would suddenly jump up and start reciting Heine by heart, his eyes filling with tears; then, dropping Heine, he would talk nonsense or deliver a fantastic lecture on the History of Gesture (with grotesque illustrations), or tell of some very interesting case from his legal practice. He might have earned colossal money as a lawyer, but he would not give up the Senate where he was friendly with everybody, the judges as well as the messengers. I have seen him with both, and there was not much difference in the way he treated them: the same old-fashioned emphatic courtesy, the same discreet attention; only the jokes varied. The hall-porter of the house where he lived once kept me for ten minutes explaining what a wonderful gentleman Mr. Tavrov was. And Potyomkin, Tavrov's bosom friend, a man of many talents, all ruined by vodka and prostitutes, once said in his cups to Dremine: “I don't care a damn for God or men, but if this creature”—jerking his head at Tavrov—“should ever do anything nasty I'd go and drown myself on the spot.” But perhaps the most extraordinary thing about Tavrov was his foible for pornography. It came on him in fits: he would suddenly launch into an erotic disquisition, with most unsavoury descriptions and tedious insistence on filthy details. I was used to that sort of stuff, having had a lot of it at the Lytzei, but coming from him it shocked and disgusted me—so much so that once I asked him to stop it. He was puzzled. “But why? What's wrong?” he asked in naïve surprise. “Why may one talk on one subject and not on another?” But he did not treat me to pornography after that.

With time I learned the story of his life. It was a sad story. On account of his advanced political opinions he had broken with his family while at the university, and had starved for a couple of years. His first fiancée was killed in a street accident

on the eve of the wedding. A few years later he married another girl, a weak, ailing creature; she could not bear the stress of poverty, and went mad in childbirth. His son died. He plunged into work, for ten years he did nothing but work; he made a brilliant career, and then love came once more to him—a hopeless love, since his wife was still alive in the asylum, and the girl he loved did not respond to his feelings. I have met her. She was a nice person, but I thought her too ordinary for Tavrov. In her presence he was unrecognisable: all his brilliancy left him, he hardly spoke at all, just looked at her with the look of a timid devoted dog. It was a pathetic sight, I avoided seeing them together.

It is the same with chemical substances as with mental states. All the conditions necessary for a change may be there, and yet the change does not happen. To bring it about, the retort—or the man, as the case may be—must be given a good shake-up. The atomic inertia is then destroyed, the hidden energies break out, and a sudden turbulence shows that the elements have entered into a new combination.

To me this shake-up came in the form of an apparently quite trivial question which Mme Surin asked me one evening when I was having tea at her house. Had I heard, she asked, that Lydia was going abroad? Where? To England. When? Oh, at once, in forty-eight hours.

The news was upsetting, very upsetting and annoying. Why had not Lydia told me about it herself? She might have telephoned or written a note. But evidently she could not be bothered: it did not matter to her in the least whether she said Good-bye to me or not. And that she called friendship! . . . "Demands destroy relationships," Tavrov had said once, but I failed to remember these words of his.

As early as decency permitted I left the Surins, hurried home and rang up Lydia. She was out, and then I felt quite miserable. I could not stay at home, so I called on Tit, but his chatter bored me. I went back home, and paced up and down my room, rehearsing the sarcastic things I would say to Lydia. To go to England without saying a word to me, to me!

I contrived to see her the next day. She received me in her study. She was packing; an open case lay on the floor.

"I'm frightfully sorry, but I couldn't let you know," she said. "It was only decided two days ago, all of a sudden, and when I rang you up at your office yesterday you weren't there."

This must have been true, I had spent most of the day at the Treasury getting some information for Dremin. The grudge I had worked up against her melted.

"For how long are you going?" I asked.

"Till October."

"Five months? Good Lord! It's a long time."

She told me she was first going with her father to Nauheim for a couple of weeks, then to England, where she proposed spending the rest of the summer. She had always dreamt of seeing England, and now her dream had come true—was not it wonderful?

I smoked in silence. I followed the movements of her long thin arms, I looked at the gentle curve of her cheek as she bent her head over the case, and my heart grew heavy. Five months! No doubt she would enjoy herself, she would rush about her beloved England and never think of me, whilst I. . . .

Presently she finished packing and straightened herself up.

"Now we can talk quietly at last," she said sitting down on the sofa, her eyes shining with suppressed joy, the anticipatory joy of her journey. For five months she would be away, for five months I would not see her. My mind was in a turmoil—it was as though a powerful spring was being wound up in my chest. I knew I must say something, but could find nothing to say. She must have noticed what was happening in me, for a strained look came into her eyes. She consulted her watch.

"Oh, it's later than I thought," she said irresolutely. "I'm afraid I'll have to go in a minute, father will be waiting for me."

I got up.

"In that case I'd better go," I said. "Good-bye."

I came up to her, took her hand, and suddenly a wave of

despair rose in me; my legs grew weak, I fell on my knees, seized her hand, and words, unexpected, unpremeditated, words which sounded strange to my own ears, broke out in a rush.

"Why are you going, why? What shall I do without you? You mean so much to me, you don't know how much, I didn't know myself. Can't you postpone your going? or can't you at least come back earlier?"

She was cowering in the corner of the sofa, an expression of bewilderment and fright on her face. And as soon as I saw that expression through the haze that obscured my mind, I sobered down and realised that I was doing something horribly stupid and piteous. I let her hand go and got up.

"Forgive me," I said. "I didn't mean to say that, it slipped out. If you're angry with me I'll go for good."

"I'm not angry," she whispered, still fixing me with that frightened and puzzled look.

"That's all right then. As for the rest . . ." Again I did not know what to say.

There was an awkward pause. Then steps resounded in the corridor, and her father's voice called: "Hurry up, Lydia!"

That drew me out of my stupor. I said good-bye once more and left the room.

In the street, as I walked to the Ministry, I mentally rehearsed the scene I had just enacted, and it seemed false and incomprehensible to me. I was not in love with the girl; love, I knew, was something quite, quite different; why then had I behaved in that way? Had I been acting? I remembered the troubled look in her eyes, and felt deeply ashamed of myself. I had spoiled a valuable relationship—why?

I notice that I have always, at all ages, fallen on my knees when declaring passion. My legs on these occasions used to grow so weak that I simply could not stand. That was certainly not pretending or acting; and yet I have a suspicion that the impulse to kneel came not from within me but from the romantic convention which was prevalent in Russia at that time. In Russia a man did not "take" a woman's love, as he



does, or is supposed to do in England, but had to "beg" for it; and the genuflexion was symbolical of that begging attitude. I must have assimilated this convention from the air, so to speak, till it became my second nature, strong enough to affect my muscular system. . . . I may be wrong though; it's only a matter of conjecture.

The feeling of shame which I had experienced on leaving Lydia soon passed. For I discovered that I had not been acting after all: she had indeed wrought a transformation in me. Now that she was away I thought of her all the time, and missed her all the time with an intensity which surprised me. Whether I was by myself or with people, part of my mind remained detached from my surroundings and tried to reconstruct the sound of her voice, the movements of her long thin arms, the look of her attentive grey eyes. At night, the memory of her grew into an obsession, I almost physically felt her presence in the room; I would speak to her, and although she did not answer I always knew when she approved of what I was saying and when she did not. I knew she forbade me to mention my feelings for her, so I spoke to her of other matters, those which I had discussed with her in her study: I roamed about the sea of thought, growing eloquent and elated, and then with a shock the realisation would come that I was alone and would be alone for five months. . . .

It was spring, the time when the wonderful White Nights march over the North, when the smell of the budding birch-trees spreads a subtle poison in the air, when the unnatural undying light, greenish, ghostly, glassy, irritates the nerves, stirs up feverish elusive images, weakens the body with a futile purposeless tension; the time when hens stop laying eggs, for they think the day never ends and wear themselves out with excitement. At midnight I would go out and walk about the streets, deserted, becalmed in an unhealthy torpor, and unreal fantastic expectations would flower in my brain. That next corner—I have only to turn it, and something wonderful will happen; I shall suddenly see her, slim and erect in her English suit, her arm slightly bent with that inimitable

angular grace of hers, her serious eyes looking straight at me. "You see, I've come back after all," she will say stretching out her hand, and we will go together, saying nothing, because everything will be clear. . . .

I wrote to her, and my letters were insincere and false; since her double forbade me to say what was uppermost in me, I expatiated on the things which were furthest away from us both—on Martinique and monkeys, the justification of good and the Pyramids; and the poor girl, as she confessed to me fifteen years later, would cudgel her brain trying to understand why I wrote "like that." Her letters were very short, and invariably ended with a half-humorous, half-plaintive exclamation: "I don't know how to write; as soon as I take a pen, my head goes all empty." No wonder it did; but at the time these very natural utterances seemed to me to conceal some deep hidden meaning. Why could she not write? why did her head go all empty? Had she not recovered yet from the shock I had given her? or was she a victim of the same obsession as I? . . .

Exhausted by this unceasing concentration of thought I rebelled against my mental enslavement. I said to myself that I did not love her, that love was something quite, quite different. What was there to love in her? Nothing. She was just an ordinary girl, a doll like the rest of the Surins' friends; it was only my imagination that gave meaning to her silences which were in fact meaningless. . . . Having worked myself up to this state of scepticism I would write to her an ironical letter calculated to annoy her, only to tear it up in the end and resume pacing my room, from the piano to the sofa and back to the piano, cursing my weakness, trying not to think of her, and longing for her presence.

Said Tavrov one day:

"You've been different lately, my friend. You seem to hear a voice calling you, but you don't know where it comes from, and you feel perturbed. It's life that is calling you; don't run away from life, obey her call." Words so aptly describing my state that I felt uneasy.

One night in June I was walking in the park on the Islands. The dawn was just breaking, a solemn stillness hung in the air, the glassy greenish dome of the sky was lifting higher and higher. All of a sudden a sound broke the benumbed silence, the sound of someone running through the brushwood, and a few moments later a girl rushed out on to the footpath, hesitated and subsided on to the grass with a low moan. I hurried up to her.

At first she panted and could not speak. But although she seemed frightened, her eyes, I noticed, were laughing. She was eighteen, small, neatly but modestly dressed, probably a shop girl. She had a pretty face, with large lustrous eyes and soft typically Russian features.

"Oh, it's nothing," she said when she had recovered her breath and risen to her feet. "It's only his face. What a horrid face!" She shuddered, and started brushing her frock.

"Whose face?"

"The coachman's." She brushed some grass off her sleeve.

"What coachman?"

"Purishkevitch's."

That sounded odd. What had she to do with Purishkevitch, that prominent member of the Duma, half clown and half genius, whom they suspended at every other meeting for rowdy behaviour and obscene interruptions, and who now and again delivered himself of a first-rate speech? I questioned her, and bit by bit I learnt the whole story.

Like myself she had been roaming about the Islands—she said she often did it—when a smart carriage drew up and the man inside offered to give her a ride. She liked his face, and although he was quite drunk, decided to take the risk; so she climbed in and they drove on. He behaved very nicely, "like a gentleman"; he said she was a pretty chit of a girl, and asked what she did. Hats, she answered, whereupon he burst out laughing and cried: "Hats, oh Lord!" "I know who you are, you are Purishkevitch," she said, for she had seen his photograph in the papers; and he said she must not read papers, because all journalists were sons of bitches. Then he fell asleep and snored, and she wondered whether she ought to

get out, but suddenly the coachman reined in the horses and turned to her. "Now listen, you little tart," he said, "the boss is quite safe now, gunfire wouldn't wake him. Put your hand in his side pocket and take out the notecase, we'll share what's in it." She said she could not do that, because it was stealing, but he looked so wickedly at her—"just like a wolf"—that she was frightened and did as he said. She handed him the notecase—it was bulging with credit notes; he pulled out two, of five roubles, and gave them to her. "That'll do for you," he said. "And now be off, or I'll wake the master and tell him I've caught you stealing." Whereupon she jumped out of the carriage and ran till she could run no more. She lost one of the notes on the way, "and here's the other," she said. She glanced at it in disgust, crumpled it, and threw it away. "Damn the dirty thing!"

I picked it up and handed it back to her. "You've fully earned it," I said. We looked at each other and burst out laughing. She was charming when she laughed, and her teeth were a joy to behold.

We sat down on a bench and chatted, I blowing the tobacco smoke into her face to drive off the mosquitoes. Then I saw her home: curiously enough, she lived in the same street as Tavrov. When we were still a block away from it she told the cabman to stop and got out. I asked her why she was doing it, but she ignored my question. I then asked her whether I could call on her one day, and she said Yes. She lived in No. 48, in her sister's flat, and her name was Katya Roshkin.

"I'll call on you next Sunday," I said, "and we'll go into the country somewhere. Agreed?"

"All right."

She soon became my mistress.

Katya was a charming girl and an excellent companion—good-natured, sober-minded, with a sound sense of humour and plenty of restrained vitality. I saw a lot of her. We used to go for long walks, preferably in the evenings, and on Sundays we drove into the country. We ate sweets—she was a glutton when it came to sweets; we talked about everything

and nothing, and we kissed (she knew how to kiss!). Anya, her sister, lived herself with a lover, held the idea of marriage in abhorrence, and did not interfere with us. Sometimes Katya's girl friends dropped in, ostensibly to borrow a needle or scissors, but really to see her "gentleman boy." Sometimes Anya came to have tea with us. She would tell us stories, of which she had an inexhaustible stock, and sang duets with Katya: folksongs and sectarian tunes (they belonged to a Protestant sect, the Pashkovtsi, and used the same tunes which I occasionally hear played in London by the Salvation Army). When she sang, Anya leaned back in her chair, gathered up her face into doleful creases, and blinked piteously whilst Katya rested her chin on her hands and stared in front of her with wide-open, unseeing eyes. Or we would go to Anya's room and talk to Andrey, her lover, a superior mechanic, a quiet strong man who drank enormous quantities of tea and was a revolutionary.

Did I love Katya? At the time I thought I did (at present the question seems senseless to me). In any case, I never felt satiated with her body, I could spend whole days with her without feeling bored, and I admired her character. She was a fine girl, with that nobility of nature which is as rare amongst titled people as in the lower classes, absolutely truthful, absolutely reliable in small things and big: she simply did not know how to lie or pretend. And never did I detect so much as a trace of vulgarity in her, not even when one night I took her to a party with a few of the Old Boys (which I did partly to show off to them). She behaved modestly and naturally; the fact that socially speaking they were miles above her made no impression on her: she spoke to them exactly as though they were the brothers of her little seamstresses. But when I was taking her home: "I don't want to meet them again," she said. "We are so different."

What struck me particularly about Katya and Anya was their outspokenness concerning things which I used to consider intimate. Even when I, a stranger, was there, they would freely discuss their love affairs and money troubles, criticising and advising each other. Not that they were

indiscreet—Katya, I knew, could be trusted with any secret; but they had no false shame, they did not mind showing themselves as they were. As I would put it now, they were realists, that is to say they did not worry about appearances. I remember how awkward I felt at my first money transaction with Katya, when I pushed the notes furtively into her hand and muttered something about “a few roubles.” She, I saw, was puzzled at my embarrassment; she looked at me, then at the money, then nodded: “Thank you.” Yet when we went out together she always restrained me in my expenditure: why waste money? she said.

I liked to listen to her stories. They were perfect in their own way: clear, concise, to the point. She knew exactly what she wanted to say, and the right words in which to say it. When listening to her I sometimes thought of Pushkin and his terse, straightforward style.

I soon learnt the reason for her conspiratorial behaviour on the morning when I had brought her home from the Islands. A man was after her, Dimitri by name. A year ago she had given herself to him “because he pestered me day and night,” and had thereupon conceived a loathing for him. He, on the other hand, had gone quite crazy about her, and had ever since besieged her with offers of marriage. He cried and threatened to kill her and himself; he spied on her movements and spent hours in front of her house waiting for her to come out. Luckily Anya’s flat had a back entrance (the one I was made to use) and as it led to another street, Katya could go in and out undetected. He was a cashier at a bank, and had quite a good salary. One night it nearly came to a drama.

That night Andrey, Anya’s lover, happened to be out on duty. A bell rang at midnight just as we were going to bed, and in a fit of absent-mindedness—for she ought to have known better—Anya opened the door. Dimitri burst into the hall. He was quite drunk and had a revolver in his hand.

“Where is she? Who’s with her? I saw a man’s shadow against the curtain!” he shouted, and made for the door of Katya’s room.

At the sound of his voice Katya had plunged under the bed. I jumped up and, placing myself in front of the door, took up the position prescribed for boxing (that position was all I knew about boxing). Dimitri being bigger and stronger than myself, my only chance was to knock him down at once, in the first second. Unfortunately the door was no defence at all: it had no lock and—a thing as unusual in Russia as it is in England—opened both ways. Knowing this, Anya barred Dimitri's way.

"You shan't go in," she said firmly. "This is my house and I won't let you prowl about my rooms."

"I only want to make sure Katya is alone. I promise . . ."

"I don't care what you promise. If you don't go this moment I'll call Andrey, and he'll give it you hot." Then, changing her tone, gently and persuasively: "Now, Dimitri, don't be a fool. You feed your mind on jealousy, no wonder you see Katya's lovers in every corner. You'll get worse if you don't stop drinking, you'll be seeing pink elephants soon. Fancy breaking into somebody else's house like that with a revolver! If you want to know, it was my shadow you saw on the window, I was tucking Katya in. Pull yourself together, man!"

I heard Dimitri stagger away from the door and sink heavily on a trunk. He slobbered. His life, he said, was hell. He was sure Katya had a lover, he had seen the two of them in a cab, and the thought of it was driving him mad. "I would give my life for her, my life!" he said, beating himself on the chest.

Anya comforted him, reasoned with him, and tried to coax him into surrendering his revolver. But he would not; he said he must have it to shoot Katya's lover or himself. Then again he started blubbering. "She's given herself to me, we're married in the eyes of God," he cried. Anya spat on the floor. "That's blasphemy, leave God out of it," she said. "Give me the revolver." "No, I won't, I'll shoot myself, I can't bear it any longer." "All right then, go and shoot yourself, but not in my house, I don't want the police here . . ."

Meanwhile I remained standing in front of the door, my eyes fixed on the point at which Dimitri's face might appear,

my muscles taut for a decisive blow. I was badly frightened, and yet at the same time I enjoyed the feeling of danger: I wished he would break in, so that we could have a real fight. Katya lay as still as a mouse under the bed. The desultory conversation in the hall went on. Nothing, said Dimitri, remained for him but vodka. "That's right," said Anya derisively. "Go on drinking, that'll help you a lot. . . . Oh, go away for heaven's sake! Don't you see I'm quite frozen standing here and listening to your whimpering?"

Gradually his speech grew more and more indistinct, his voice faded away. And then there was suddenly a double outcry, followed by a loud crash. Luck was against Dimitri that night. Thinking that the danger had passed, Anya had the imprudence to step aside, leaving open the approach to the door; Dimitri made a rush at it, but the bottom of his trousers caught in the iron bracket of the trunk, and he fell headlong. Anya quickly picked up the revolver which he had dropped. Her tone changed.

"Out, you drunken beast!" she shouted. "Out, or I'll shoot you! One—two——"

Dimitri beat a hurried retreat. Katya's frightened face appeared from under the bed (she looked wonderfully pretty at this moment). "Gone! Thank God!" she said with feeling. Simultaneously the door opened a little, Anya's hand appeared round it, and something fell with a metallic clatter on to the floor: Dimitri's revolver.

"You and your lovers!" Anya shouted in a rage, ran to her room and had a fit of hysterics. Katya ran after her, and they had a lively time together. Without undressing I sank on the bed and instantly fell asleep. I slept for twelve hours without waking, and the next morning every muscle in my body was aching.

They never gave Dimitri his revolver back; Andrey kept it, and later on, when a search was made in his flat, he got into trouble over it.

At the beginning of my liaison with Katya I expected that it would rid me of my obsession with the other girl. It did not.



So long as I was with Katya, Lydia was out of my thoughts, I did not remember her. But when alone I at once found myself enwrapped in her atmosphere, I longed for her and was haunted by her. Did I love them both? I wondered. Or none of them? Or was it love split in two: the physical half and the spiritual? I did not know. In any case, I had no scruples about the duality of my feeling: how could it be wrong to love two if it was not wrong to love one?

Petersburg was empty in the summer: all my friends and acquaintances had moved to the country, and I spent most of my time with Katya. But two evenings a week I stayed at home, and those were devoted to Lydia. I thought of her, wrote to her, and talked to her, pacing up and down my study, from the piano to the sofa and back, till late into the night. The White Nights were fortunately over, so that at least I slept well. And so I got through the summer.

Lydia returned in September, earlier than she anticipated. The night preceding our first meeting I did not have a wink of sleep, I tried to guess what she might say, and rehearsed what I was to answer. But when I saw her in the flesh, sunburnt, healthy-looking, with a friendly light in her eyes, I forgot my part and merely said: "Hullo!"

We settled in her study, and she proceeded to tell me about her stay in England. She had thoroughly enjoyed herself, had bathed at Seaford and punted on the Thames, been to the races and Covent Garden Opera, seen Cornwall and Scotland. The English, she said, were frightfully nice people, so easy to deal with and good at all sorts of fun. "What fun?" I asked, and she was puzzled. "But I've just told you: punting and bathing and that sort of thing." As I listened to her, my joy waned, for I realised how wide apart we were, she with her taste for quiet, simple enjoyment and a slow—English—mode of life; and I with my impatient, restless nature, my thirst for spiritual adventures. My dejection expressed itself in an outburst against the English.

"Yes, they may be nice and polite and what not," I said. "But they are cold, soulless. They have no warmth of heart, they're only capable of impersonal relationships, those that

are founded on duty, business and amusement. That's the price one has to pay for being civilised: in a crowded and highly organised community a soul is a social danger, it's too explosive . . ."

I knew I was saying the wrong thing, which only increased the distance between us, but I could not stop. Lydia felt that my diatribe was really personal, directed against her rather than England; she said nothing, and a strained obstinate look appeared in her eyes.

Later in the evening, however, I found the right tone. I parodied Tavrov, recited some absurd poems, and, soaring up on the wings of imagination, harangued her on subjects infinitely more important than trips and punting. The obstinate expression left her face; I knew I was holding her attention.

When leaving, "I'm sorry," I said from the doorway.

She understood what I meant.

"Oh, that's all right," she said awkwardly and, after a slight hesitation, in a subdued voice: "I was glad to see you again." Words which made me happy for the rest of the night.

In the meantime Dremin's plan was taking practical shape. The Duma had allotted the necessary credits, and hundreds of agricultural instructors were working in the provinces helping the new settlers to introduce the manifold rotation of crops and supplying them with modern implements. Our section worked very hard; sometimes we even came to the Ministry on Sundays. There were now seven of us, and I, Dremin's assistant, was earning some £350 a year, a fantastically high figure for a youngster with only three years of service. My personal expenditure being low, I could help both my mother and Katya quite a lot.

My life was still divided into two watertight compartments. Half of my free time I spent with Katya, the other half was filled with longing for Lydia. When I was with the one, the other did not exist for me.

With Katya everything was simple and easy. We chatted,

laughed, kissed. When once she fell ill with a venomous influenza, I sat by her bedside and read Tchekov to her. His humorous stories left her indifferent, they were "just ordinary," she said; she liked him better when he was earnest, smiling through his tears, and she adored his *Black Monk* (which is indeed the best ghost story ever written). One night she was sick, and I had to clear up the mess; to my surprise I found that the job ceased to be disgusting once I actually tackled it.

On Lydia I called once a week, as in the previous winter. We had silently buried the memory of what had happened in May, and once again I felt unconstrained and happy with her. Not always, though. Sometimes conversation flagged, the pauses grew longer and longer, and, knowing what that meant, I would pounce upon the first subject that came into my head and talk, talk, working up an artificial enthusiasm and knowing all the while that I was but deceiving myself, that I cared not for my sparkling theories but only for her response, and that response I should never get, not if I spoke with the tongues of angels. Bitterness would rise in me, I would grow sardonic and fulminate against England, because England stood for that part of Lydia's nature which was alien to me; against motor-cars, because she used to go motoring with some cousins of hers; against worldliness, because she went to dances and theatres. Feeling the personal antagonism in my speech, she would frown. "I don't like it when you talk like that," she said sharply one day. I tried to think of a sarcastic retort, but could not find any and said meekly: "I'm sorry."

The winter passed, the spring began. Once more she went abroad. I was almost glad.

## “WINE IS RUSSIA’S JOY”

(Prince Vladimir, tenth century)

THAT summer I did a lot of travelling.

July I spent in the Crimea on the Surins’s estate, by what had been the historical river Alma (I say “had been” because the river itself dries up in the summer and all that is left of it is a few puddles). The Surins had a spacious house in the Tartar style with a paved *patio* in the middle and a score of rooms, each opening on the *patio*. We young people played tennis (perfectly naked, pouring water on ourselves every few minutes), bathed in a deep narrow well, slept Oriental fashion after dinner, and ate a fabulous amount of fruit; at dinner, instead of pudding, every one was given a melon *and* a water melon. I went for a fortnight’s walk in the mountains: shirt, trousers, tennis shoes, and a loaf of bread hanging on a string from my belt. I avoided the populous Crimean Riviera—which, by the way, is more beautiful than the French—and kept to the wild northern slope of the ridge. There, tucked away in deep valleys, only a day’s walk from the fashionable sea resorts, were Tartar villages in which the passing of a tourist was an event. When I rested in a café—usually a primitive grocery—the Tartars would collect, squat on the earthen floor and sit for hours without saying a word, smoking and watching me. The women went about veiled and had magnificent figures. The sheep dogs on the plateau are as fierce as wolves and look terrifying; once I spent a whole morning on a big boulder besieged by half a dozen of these beasts. If you want to know the real taste of water, climb up the main Crimean range in a temperature of 110 and walk along the top for a couple of hours more, looking for a spring; then you will understand why the Tartar songs compare water to the kiss of the beloved.

In September the Department sent me on a tour in the provinces to collect some information concerning Dremine’s plan.

I started with Ufa, a province at the foot of the Urals. The railway net in East Russia is very thin indeed, so that I had to do practically all the travelling between the district towns—several hundred miles altogether—by carriage. It had been raining for weeks, and what a Russian road is like after a lot of rain cannot be imagined by a European. After you have driven for a hundred yards, the wheels become transformed into solid discs, with the whole space between the spokes filled in by viscous Black Soil. You drive off the road all the time, across fields, meadows, or marshy ground, since in the softened grooves of the road the wheels at once sink down to their axles. You advance at the rate of two to four miles an hour, your body performing an inexhaustible variety of plunges, jerks and contortions which make you think longingly of the comfort of a channel boat in a gale. It takes many years of practice to get used to this kind of locomotion. "Don't keep stiff, make a loose bag of yourself," said the experienced agronomer who accompanied me. He did not mind the pitching and the rolling of the cabriolet, he chatted and whistled merrily the whole way. As for myself, my bowels would get inextricably mixed up after the first hour; my brain would turn into a leaden sphere which at every bump knocked heavily against the skull. "How far have we to go yet?" was the only sentence of which I was capable. The answer was invariably: "A couple of miles," which meant anything from two to five hours. I would arrive at the town in a cretinous condition, unable to understand what others were telling me and what I was saying myself. And the following morning we would be off again.

Once or twice I was lent a motor-car by the District Council. We would go for a mile or so, raising a terrific noise, throwing up fountains of mud, and leaving clouds of smoke behind us. Then the car would get stuck, we would alight and push it, ourselves immersed up to the ankles in the blessed Black Soil. It always ended in the same way: we would climb back into the car and send the chauffeur on foot to the nearest village to get horses. "These newfangled things are no good," my companion the agronomer would say contemptuously.

From the Urals I went south, thinking with joy that there would be no more driving, since all my business was in Poltava, the ex-capital of the Ukraine. In a couple of days I had collected the material required, and was about to return to Petersburg, but at the last moment Gorlenko, the Supervisor of the Ministry, got hold of me. He was a man of forty-five, strongly built, a typical Ukrainian, with a broad face, slily smiling eyes and a glorious pink complexion.

"Oh no, we can't let you go like that," he declared. "You must see Poltava first. It's a fine town, the cradle of the Cossacks. We'll start with the Bristol."

The Bristol was a restaurant (there were Bristols in every town in Russia). We went along, and I was introduced to Bobby, an elderly man, short and stout, with a drooping grey moustache, flabby features, and perpetually screwed-up eyes, as though he were about to dissolve in tears the next moment. As I learned later on, he was Marshal of Nobility, and an unusually efficient Marshal, too. He was sitting at the table all by himself, a bottle of Mumm Extra Sec before him.

"Hullo, my child!" he welcomed Gorlenko in a thin, lachrymose voice. "So glad to see you. And who is it you've brought with you? Mr. Gubsky? Sounds like a Cossack name" (so it is). "Delighted to welcome you, Mr. Gubsky, in your country. Do sit down. Hey, waiter!"

A waiter dressed in white rushed to his side.

"Sidor, dearest, do get us some more of this stuff, please." With his plump finger Bobby pointed at the bottle. "Bring two of them, if you don't mind, it'll save you some running."

Sidor departed. We talked about Petersburg and agriculture until the bottles arrived. Bobby eyed them lovingly.

"That's right!" he said, rubbing his hands. "Well, children, let's drink. To Poltava and the undying glory of the Cossacks."

We drank. At Bobby's request Gorlenko started telling stories. This is an art which is stone dead in England but was still alive in the Russia of that period, and Gorlenko was certainly the best exponent of it I have ever met. He did wonderful things with his face: by a mere contraction of his

facial muscles he could look like an old peasant woman, a brave Hussar, an old Jew—anybody; and his imitation of voices, gestures and dialects was perfect. He was brimming with stories, he poured them out by the dozen, stories about a Jewess who wanted to have a baby but went the wrong way about it; about a timid priest and his all too passionate wife; about an Armenian who decided to make love to women—for a change; and so forth. After every story he drank a glass of wine exactly as though it were water, cleared his throat, and gravely stroked his moustache. “Well now, here’s one about a parlourmaid and a policeman . . .” Bobby laughed, his round belly shaking rhythmically; as strength forsook him his laugh went higher and higher up the octave until it passed into a piteous whine. I rocked on my chair, holding my sides: I had a stitch. Sidor, the waiter, standing as close as respect permitted, giggled discreetly into his palm; at one moment he choked and dropped a plate.

More children appeared—Bobby’s generic name for his boon-companions: Vanya, the Governor’s Secretary, a neat thin youth with a monocle and the demeanour of a budding statesman (he had been transferred to the provinces from Petersburg for having signed the wrong name on a cheque); Petka, a little moon-faced man, who did not speak a word and only smiled ingratiatingly; and the Clerk to the Justices, a giant with a potato nose, who went by the name of Python. From the Bristol we moved to the Tivoli, a suburban restaurant where we took a private room and ordered supper. It was a colossal supper, with a dozen courses; I dropped out before we were half-way through it; the rest, including the meagre Vanya, went on eating with unabated hunger. Soon a battery of empty bottles had grown in the middle of the table. Vanya, his eyes moist with elation, recited some poem about Caucasian peaks, waving the leg of a crab. The moon-faced man strummed a guitar, smiling mildly to himself. Gorlenko and Python in their shirt-sleeves danced a Gopak. Bobby clapped his hands, his plump body jerking to the rhythm of the dance. I ate little pieces of bread with a lot of butter on them: you can hold out longer if you do that.

Later still, Vanya started reciting some French sonnet, but got stuck in the middle and pouted. "Well then, I wwwwon't," he declared peevishly, and struck up the Marseillaise. "What about your Governor?" Gorlenko reminded him. "Damn the Governor, may his mother . . ." shouted the budding statesman. Meanwhile the population of the room had increased, but since they never stood still, I could not count them. Above me, suspended in a cloud of blue smoke, towered a long, bony officer with silver epaulettes, which shook—probably because he was laughing. Suddenly the epaulettes vanished, and the officer's nose took on the shape of a potato: the fellow was impersonating Python. "You can't take me in, no, you can't!" I mumbled trying to smile, but my lips were wooden and refused to move.

Then the moon-faced man was helping me into a steep carriage, I protesting because of a body which lay diagonally across the seat. "That's all right, sit on his head," said Gorlenko, and, turning to the driver: "Take this one to the Bristol, and this one to the Regina. And mind you, don't mix them up. . . . Well, Petka," he clapped the little man on the back. "Let's go and have a proper drink now."

The next morning I was drinking some very black coffee when Gorlenko appeared. He enquired how I felt, and on hearing my answer beckoned to the waiter.

"Sidor, take that muck away," he ordered, "and bring us some Madeira."

We drank. Then Bobby came along. "Children, children," he said in plaintive reproach. "How can you start the day with Madeira? That isn't right. Hey, Sidor, two bottles of Mumm, please."

At midday I remembered that I must pack: my train was leaving soon. "There's plenty of time," said Gorlenko. "Drink first to Poltava." I drank to Poltava, then to Agrarian Reform, then to Bobby, then to something else. Then we had lunch, and after that the time went wrong altogether: my train, it appeared, had gone ages ago, and instead of the train I was with the others in a motor car bumping along a country



road, with a wicker basket at our feet. There was an altercation as to where we were going; no one knew for certain and it did not matter. Python intoned *Gaudeamus Igitur*, but bit his tongue when the car gave a violent jerk which made us all fall in a heap. The chauffeur climbed down and announced that the road was too bad to proceed. "Splendid chap!" roared Gorlenko; he extracted a bottle of brandy from the wicker basket and made the chauffeur swallow a tea-glassful of it. We drove back. Whenever I opened my eyes I saw brown cows on the road; there were thousands of cows, and the car was trying to ram every one of them. I felt sorry for the dumb beasts, and begged Python to stop this butchery, but for reply he only hit me on the head. I knew I was too weak to fight him, so I fell sulkily asleep.

When I woke the car was at a standstill and a strong light was shining into my eyes: the lamp of the Bristol. "Now we'll make some nice punch," said Gorlenko as he dragged me out of the car. "You won't!" I declared fiercely and pushed him away. I deposited my hat in a palm-pot full of cigarette ends and staggered upstairs. Gorlenko sent a shower of Ukrainian expletives after me and went with the others to the Tivoli, which they left at sunrise. And at nine in the morning, as fresh and pink as ever, he was making a report to Rittich, the Under Secretary for Agriculture who had come to "establish a closer contact with the County Councils."

After lunch three troikas left the town. In the first sat His Excellency and Bobby; in the second, Gorlenko, Python, and I. Gorlenko had decided it would do me good to see the country; he had spoken to this effect to H. E., and I could not very well back out of it. As for Python, the Clerk to the Justices, he, of course, had nothing whatever to do with Agrarian Reform, but Bobby had said to H. E.: "Do take him, please, he's such a dear," and H. E. had replied that nothing would give him a greater pleasure. In the third troika there were two agronomers and an engineer—in case H. E. should require technical information.

Now and again the troikas stopped and H. E. climbed out to inspect an Artesian well, an experimental field, or a breeding

station. "A fine beast," he said, looking with apprehension at a fire-breathing bull. "How many cows does he—ahem—cover per annum?" "Sixty, Your Excellency," said the two agronomers in a chorus, stepping forward to reply and then retreating. "Oh, sixty," echoed H. E., not sure whether that was good or bad. We also called on a settler. His wife threw up her arms in a panic and rushed into the house. A little child with nothing on but a long dirty shirt put its fingers into its mouth and stared fascinated at H. E. "What's your name, little girl?" asked H. E. benignly. "Peter," replied the girl in a hoarse bass. Then the farmer came out and H. E. graciously questioned him about crops and prices, he squashing his cap in his hands and answering in monosyllables, until Gorlenko said something to him in Ukrainian; he then at once became communicative and insisted on taking the party to an evil-smelling place where two pigs were rubbing against each other. "Fine beasts!" said H. E. with unction.

We called on the local magnates and were treated to sumptuous dinners and suppers. After every meal someone new joined the expedition, so that on the second day it consisted of six troikas instead of three, the additions being: a couple of landowners; a retired Hussar captain; the head of the Fire Brigade; the district constable, and two odd-looking men who introduced themselves as "well-wishers of the Ministry." At meals they all ate and drank as though they had not seen any food for years, and on the way in the troikas sang various Volga boatmen songs in a loud and inharmonious chorus. "I like this provincial simplicity," said H. E. to Bobby, trying not to listen to the hullabaloo behind him. "It's so refreshing after our Petersburg stiffness."

On the evening of the third day the troikas reached Bobby's estate. There was supper, with a few speeches and a lot of wine. On the pretext of a headache H. E. left the table early: he was a civilised man of German extraction, and had had enough of "these unwashed Papuans." The rest went on drinking. When they were well on the go, Gorlenko issued the command: "To the nursery!"

The nursery was a large room furnished simply and

efficiently: on one side, a long sideboard with bottles and glasses, and on the other, an equally long leather sofa. It was on this sofa that a friend of Bobby's fell asleep once and did not wake up even when they poured some wine behind his collar. To bring him round Bobby seized his nose, but let it go the next moment. It was cold, the man was dead.

"Is there still courage left in Ukrainian hearts?" shouted Gorlenko. "There is!" answered the guests, and made a rush to the sideboard. Then began such an orgy as only the reckless and tempestuous *âme slave* is capable of. People laughed, yelled, sobbed; swore at each other, and while continuing to swear fell into a fervent embrace; burst into a song, and fell asleep in the middle of a strophe. Over in the corner, the Chief of the Fire Brigade was squatting; he was hatching an egg, and Python sprinkled him with wine, reciting the words of the baptismal service. The ex-Hussar, a tall and gaunt Don Quixote, was demonstrating with a stick the use of a sabre, to the joy of a venerable white-haired old man with the face of St. Nicholas. "Bash 'em, the swine!" cried St. Nicholas smiling beatifically. Someone with brick-red cheeks stumbled about, imploring people to let him have some Gorgonzola, because he could not live without Gorgonzola. Gorlenko impersonated a peasant girl flirting with a soldier; Bobby first laughed, then cried, and, forgetting why he had begun to cry, dropped his head on my shoulder and bitterly complained that nobody loved him. "Don't lean on me, I'm ffragile," I warned him.

I drank till a black cloud wrapped me up and deposited me on the leather sofa. When, after an æon or so, I opened my eyes, there were only half a dozen people left in the room, the rest had disappeared somewhere. "Come along, we'll start a pogrom!" said Gorlenko pulling me up, and we all went out into the yard and across it to the outhouse. "Hush," whispered Gorlenko, opening the door, and we squeezed ourselves noiselessly into a huge room with two rows of beds in it; in the dusk of the dawn one could see the silhouettes of sleeping bodies. Gorlenko tiptoed to one of the beds, snatched out the pillow from under someone's head, and hit him with it,

yelling: "Down with the Jews!" Then, passing to another bed, he repeated the procedure. Next to him Python was working. An inferno of sound broke out; clothed and unclothed men rushed to and fro, colliding with each other, shouting and cursing. "Police, police, police!" yelled someone in the corner, then suddenly grew quiet: Python had silenced him with a pillow. The ex-Hussar had got up on to his bed, and stood there looking uncannily long in his night-shirt, and pressing his trousers to his chest; then, raising them like a shield, he jumped down and made for the door. "Long live the Cossacks!" yelled Gorlenko.

That morning I left stealthily by the back door: I had reached my limit.

## LYDIA AND KATYA—II

WINTER . . . Katya's room; a pile of hat-boxes in the corner; bits of felt, fur, and ribbons all over the place; on the table, a squat samovar of red copper and a box of marzipan. We drink tea, discuss whether to go to the cinema or for a drive, and decide in favour of the drive; but by mistake I start kissing her, and then, of course, we don't go anywhere.

The office. Letters, circulars, interviews with agronomers; Dremen's sonorous periods; Tit's buffoonery; dismal typists slouching along the corridors; 12,000 roubles for a breeding station in Poltava; 3,000 roubles ditto in Ufa; 5,500 roubles. . .

Lydia's study: the mahogany desk; English etchings on the walls; an English picture of two tiny negro babies in a huge white bed; Tolstoy's *Resurrection* opened at the page where another Katya is drunk in prison; and Lydia, nestling on the sofa, her look now friendly and attentive, alive with *my* elation, *my* gaiety, now aloof and resisting, veiling some thoughts to which I have no access—and then a weight settles on my heart, my words are halting, my metaphors forced, and whatever I am saying is senseless, for I only want to bury my head in her lap, kiss her long thin fingers, and complain of what she has done to me.

A mental fever possessed me. It was as though thousands of little hammers were working in my head, furiously typing out a stream of words and images which had no other purpose but to stifle my longing for the girl. Sometimes they achieved this purpose: my mind would detach itself from my personal trouble and soar up into intellectual heights where I seemed to touch upon supreme truths about Life and Love and Man. But more often, much more often, all that strain was futile and only resulted in apathy and bitter questions. She knew she would never respond; why then did she hold me? Was she so insensitive as not to realise what she was doing to me? In my

heart, however, I knew the answer. She kept me because she needed me as I needed Tavrov and Dremin; I was giving her what I got from them, something which we both considered as a value. And if that was so, I had no right to leave her, I must go on and on with our relationship, not minding what it cost me.

"Can one love two women at a time?" I asked Tavrov one day.

His reply was characteristic:

"Two is but a figure, an abstraction of the intellect. And love, being a fact, has nothing to do with the intellect."

I was very dejected and tired that day—I was sleeping far too little. He, on the contrary, was in particularly high spirits.

"Cheer up, my friend!" he said. "No one is happy from beak to tail, as the adjutant observed after swallowing a spoon."

"What adjutant?"

"The bird. A long-legged thing which lives somewhere round about Africa. And like bird, like man: one mustn't give in to dejection, one must keep steady, like Cape Horn. Remember what a Holy Father said about despondency: 'A beast huge, all-devouring, hundred-mouthed, oily and croaking.'"

He went on in this strain until I smiled. But my smile must have been crooked, for he suddenly lost his animation.

"You are a hard man," he said with a sigh. "There's so little joy in life that one ought to value every fingle-fangle. And you, you throw them away: cheap stuff, you say, cheap and much too ordinary. Now why? You were gentler before. Whence this hardness? Has anyone hurt you?"

"Yes . . . a girl."

"Oh. A girl. I see." He grew very serious. "So she doesn't love you?"

"She doesn't. Nor do I love her."

"But you long for her and suffer through her and are wretched without her? Is that it? Well, it's the same thing then, the name doesn't matter. Yes, I know it's trying, very trying. And yet, you know, it's just what I wished for you."

"Then you've got your wish. But why wish it for me? What's the good? It's only weakness on my part. If I were stronger I should have broken . . ."

"How can you be so cynical?" he interrupted. "Have you been reading stupid novels about cave-men, or what? Don't you see that unrequited love is the very best thing for you in your present state? For you, not for the glory of God or some other non-existent abstraction, but for you. What you now give away in longing and stress and pain will come back to you, is coming back already, only you don't notice it. You think: 'What a fool I am to give when I ought to take.' But you aren't a fool. In the world of personal relationships the value of giving and taking is just the reverse of what it is in the market. What you take shrinks to nothing in your hands and makes you poorer than you were. And what you give away is profit, because it'll all come back to you with interest."

"What do you mean by 'interest'?"

"Understanding, of course. The understanding of other people and what they want from you. That you can only get through personal relationships, not from books, and not from the contemplation of your navel. And you'll thank her . . ."

"What for? She hasn't given me anything."

"She made you give, and that's what matters."

"But whatever I may get out of this giving will come from me, not from her."

"No, not from you!"

"Yes, from me!"

"Oh, how dense you are! How can it come from you if you never had it before? You were as poor as a church mouse before she came, so if you're getting something now it's through her, through her, you silly opinionate adolescent!"

This was the first time I saw him angry, really angry. I laughed, whole-heartedly this time.

I saw Lydia a day or two after that conversation. It was the most harmonious meeting we ever had. Nothing happened, except that we both felt light and happy. "If only I could always be like that," I thought when I left her, and as soon as

this thought crossed my mind my happiness began to wane. For that was just what I could not do. A relationship cannot be controlled at will, its course is determined not by the man's resolution, but by the momentum it has gathered all through its long development. . . .

One night I was seeing her home from a Kussevitzky concert. It was raining, so we took a cab. For a long time we did not talk. Then I said to her: "Give me your hand."

She seemed surprised, but did as I asked. I took off her glove, and held her hand to my lips. Fear appeared in her eyes, the same fear I had seen in them two years ago, the day she was packing, but it did not perturb me this time and only made me slightly amused. I let her hand go.

"Isn't it funny?" I said. "I've never proposed to you. Oh no, I won't do it now, I know it's no use . . ."

She said nothing, only drew deeper into her corner. We reached her house, the cab stopped, and she alighted. I stayed where I was, wondering with detached curiosity what she would do next.

"Good night," she said timidly.

"Good night," I said, and, turning to the driver, told him to go on.

I drove to Katya's, and found her and Anya greatly worried. Dimitri had been in again, only an hour ago. He had been quite wild, and had gone for Katya, but Anya had chased him out with a kitchen knife.

I suggested that they should tell the police, but they would not: like all women of their class they held the police in abhorrence. In that case, I thought, Katya ought to move to another place, but she demurred: she hated parting with Anya; all her friends lived in that house; and besides, if she were to call on Anya at all, Dimitri would certainly track her to her new room. We did not settle anything.

"And now go," said Anya. "I feel he'll be coming again, and I don't want any more rows."

I went. It was an ignoble exit, and I felt ashamed. Through me two women were in danger of their lives. And I felt guilty when I thought of Dimitri. Savage though he was, he did



really love Katya, whereas for me she was . . . well, not exactly a plaything, but, say, a romance.

Then a letter came from Lydia. I have kept it, and am now translating from the original:

"I only wanted to tell you that I've had a wonderful moment, such as I've never had in my life. Everything became simple, and I realised that I really believe in the future and myself. I did not before, so if I do now it is thanks to you.—L. T.

"PS. I know I've caused you a lot of pain and I'm paying more heavily for it than you think. But I know now that that is right, I can't explain why, but it's necessary for both of us."

This letter made me feel proud. I had achieved something which was not easy to achieve: I had helped her to find herself. And she was worth helping. Her heart was in the right place, and she was intelligent, she intuitively understood what very few people knew and what Tavrov had taken such pains to explain to me: that a personal relationship is not a means of happiness and not a means of anything, but an end and a value in itself.

I also knew that we would part soon, and I was glad of it.

The next time I entered her study I saw that she had been crying.

"I wanted to talk to you," she said avoiding my eye. "I don't know whether I'm doing the right thing or not . . ."

"You want me to go? Is that it?" I asked.

She nodded.

"All right, I'll go." And I got up.

"I know I've wronged you," she continued. "But I didn't realise at first, and later on I always hoped something would happen which would put it right. Also . . . you mean very much to me, I didn't want to give you up."

I felt no pain, no bitterness, only pity for her. She must feel sore indeed, I thought, if with all her reserve—her English reserve—she did not mind showing me her tears. And I understood then how egoistic had been my attitude to her.

All the time I had been thinking of myself and an abstract conception, the Plan of Relationship, without considering her, the living half of that relationship. I had demanded of her what she could not give, had been trying to force her nature, break up her tastes, spoil her joys, because they were not mine. . . .

"It's surprising that you should have stood me so long," I said, and we parted.

In the spring of that year Dremin's section was incorporated in the Second Department. What that meant, one felt the moment one crossed its threshold. The hall was dark and had the sour smell of barracks; the wall-paper was peeling; unopened parcels lay in a heap on the floor; the messengers shuffled about with a look of ultimate disillusion in their eyes. The plate on the door of the director's study had lost half of its letters; only *DI . . . . OR* remained. In the lower pane of the door there was a chink through which messengers and clerks would peep to see what the director was doing. The rooms were overcrowded, mountains of files were heaped on the tables, heaps of files lay on the floor; the officials looked grey and despondent.

The director's post was filled by a man called Kiesel. As Dremin put it, there were three points on which Kiesel resembled a horse: Face, Energy and Brain. He was an indefatigable worker, he went into every detail, overloaded his subordinates with collecting useless statistical data, and stayed in the Department till eleven at night. His hobby was committees, and he appointed them by the dozen, giving each a programme which embraced more or less the whole field of Russian agriculture. The first thing he announced to Dremin was that the work of our section must be centralised: that is to say, instead of dealing with the army of our instructors through a score of provincial offices we were to deal with every one of them individually. It was sheer lunacy; it would have increased our work by some 2,000 per cent with nothing to show for it. Dremin kicked up a row. He fought Kiesel and won, but it was a Pyrrhic victory: in the course of the fight he

lost his temper and said things to Kiesel that were incompatible with bureaucratic discipline. It was suggested to Dremin that he move to another department; he resigned. He had not a penny, but that did not worry him: he turned his thoughts to journalism.

Thus it came about that at the age of twenty-four I was made chief of a section—an unprecedented advance. But then nobody else knew the business of our section, and also—which counted a lot in the Russian bureaucracy—I was one of the best stylists in the Ministry.

"You are a lucky dog," said Tit enviously. "Damn it all, you'll now have £600 per annum or so. But why do you look so glum? You ought to be strutting like a peacock, instead of which you look as though you were following your own funeral. Oh, you are hopeless!"

I called more frequently on the Surins, and renewed some of the acquaintanceships which I had neglected. I went to wrestling tournaments with Tit. I paid court to a beautiful girl with eyes as blue and clear as mountain lakes; but she had so little brain that I could not go on. Another girl chose to fall in love with me, and that was very unpleasant, I felt ashamed of myself, although it was no fault of mine. Yes, Tavrov was right, one did not profit by what one was given.

One day I went to a fortune-teller. The woman proved to be a genuine clairvoyant. She made me sit at a distance from her, shut her eyes with her hand, and at once began to speak without asking me any questions. She described Lydia and Katya correctly in all details, including the way they did their hair and even the colour of Katya's eyes (I did not know myself, and had to verify it after the séance). She analysed my relationship with them both better than I could have done myself. It was uncanny. The only mistake she made was when she described me and Lydia sitting on an open veranda, looking at the moon and being very miserable. I told her that we had never sat on a veranda, and she shrugged her shoulders. "I'm only telling you what I see," she said. "I may be mistaken."

About this time the centenary of the Lytzey was celebrated. The festivities lasted a week, and comprised a gala performance at the Maryinsky Opera, banquets of all sorts, and a dinner at the Winter Palace. I remember incredibly lofty halls, gold, red and blue; a symphonic orchestra playing Tchaikovsky in the gallery; a Clos de Vougeot such as I have never tasted before or since, and a very queer *Pâté de Strasbourg*. When I put the first piece in my mouth I could not believe my senses and glanced furtively at my neighbours. They were in just the same predicament: they looked sheepish and were revolving the *Pâté* in their mouths, not knowing what to do with it. First one, then another took a napkin, pressed it to his lips, and put it back on the table, badly crumpled up. The *Pâté* was putrid, literally putrid!

After the meal we were drawn up in a row and the Tsar walked past, stopping to talk to some of us. I tried to recover that monarchist elation I had experienced some four years before, and could not find a trace of it in myself. It seemed incomprehensible to me that anyone could associate semi-divine functions with that insignificant creature, that obvious nonentity.

A week later I had another contact with the High Ones: the Grand Duke Kiril (now the Parisian Tsar of the Russian emigration) called at the Lytzey Club to play bridge. We came up to him in turn, bowed, shook hands, and stepped aside. I was at the back of the queue. The longer I looked at him the less comfortable I felt, so finally I edged away towards the door and slipped out.

One day, from a landing in the Ministry, I saw an odd figure in the hall: a tall man in a long black caftan such as well-off peasants used to wear. What struck me was the obsequious bows with which the porter was seeing him off. Why should he be doing that to a mujik, I wondered?

Later on, I asked the porter who that man was. "Don't you know, sir?" he said in surprise. "That was Grigori Efimich."

"And who is Grigori Efimich?"

"His name is Rasputin, sir." The porter dropped his voice to a whisper. "They say he's the first person at Court; even the

Ministers are afraid of him. And he gave me this, sir." With a grin he showed me a fifty-rouble note (£5).

I had heard some rumours about a mysterious mujik who knew how to help the ailing Tsarevich and had an ascendancy over the Imperial family, but I used to dismiss them as idle gossip.

"What did he want?" I asked.

"He came to see the Minister. I told him that His Excellency was in the building opposite, and he's gone over. . . . I'm afraid His Excellency won't like him," he ended, shaking his head with an apprehension which proved prophetic.

I have the continuation of this story from the Minister's secretary, whom I knew well. The Minister at that time was Krivoshein, about the only statesman in Russia of that period who had both ability and moral courage. On learning that Rasputin had called he flew in a rage.

"Tell the scoundrel to go to hell, or I'll have him thrown out," he said to the secretary.

The secretary went to Rasputin and said that unfortunately His Excellency could not receive him, being very busy, and would not Grigori Efimich kindly put his business in writing, when it would receive due consideration.

Rasputin sighed.

"It's a pity, a great pity," he said humbly. "I see I'll have to raise the matter at Tsarskoe Selo. I didn't want to bother Mother Tsaritsa, but I'll have to since your boss is so obstinate."

A week later Krivoshein had an audience with the Tsar. His Majesty was particularly gracious that day, and kept him half an hour longer than had been scheduled—a rare honour. On returning home, however, Krivoshein found an Imperial Ukaze announcing his dismissal: it had been brought by a courier at the very hour of the gracious audience.

Three months passed. I saw Katya less often than before. A leak had sprung between the watertight compartments of my mind: even when I held her in my arms I would sometimes remember Lydia and grow absent-minded and dejected. Too much work, I said to Katya.

And then in May I met Lydia. It was pure chance: I was leaving the Surins's house just as she was coming up the porch. We stopped and stared at each other.

"Nobody is at home," I said, "so don't trouble to go up."

"Oh," she said. I expected she would say good-bye, but she did not. We went down the porch.

"Which way are you going?" she asked.

"To the right." And since we both had to go in the same direction, I added: "I'll go to the left if you like."

"No, why should you?"

We walked in silence for a while.

"I wanted to ask you something," she began hesitatingly.

"It's probably quite wrong of me, but . . . but . . ."

As she could not bring herself to speak, I helped her.

"Look at me," I said. "Do you think I've guessed what's the matter?"

She glanced at me and nodded. My heart beat wildly with joy.

"You may find it strange," she said, "but there's something . . ."

I told her that I need not know her motives, but she insisted on telling me them. A young man, a student whom I knew, was badly in love with her, and that made her miserable, she did not know why—so miserable that at times she was ready to marry him although she did not love him. And she had the feeling that I was the only one who could help her. She had thought of writing to me, "but you know how bad I am about writing"; now, however, since chance had brought us together. . . .

"What seems chance is always a plan, so don't run away from it," Tavrov used to say. I did not run away.

That spring I saw her half a dozen times. Our relations regained the natural ease of the time when, to use Tavrov's words, demand did not disturb the free play of sympathy. By tacit agreement we avoided her study and stayed mostly in the drawing-room, where she had arranged a cosy corner behind the grand piano. There were no more strained monologues

and painful pauses as in the winter. We played ping-pong a lot, talked of ordinary subjects—I found they could be as interesting as any highfalutin abstraction—and ate huge quantities of ice-cream, which I brought surreptitiously in carton boxes, so as not to offend the susceptibilities of the very superior parlourmaid.

Before, I had tried to fall in love with Lydia—for that was what my mental acrobatics amounted to—and I had ended by exhausting her and myself. Now I did not think of love, did not want it, and love came of its own accord, quietly, without shattering emotions or big words. That was because I had ceased to think of reforming her according to any plan, and had ceased to think of myself: I felt utterly indifferent to what this strange turn of our relationship might lead to.

In June I went to her estate in Central Russia and spent a week there, seven days of unbroken sunshine and cloudless happiness. Her father was there too, and a very interesting man he proved: in listening to his terse, caustic speech I often forgot all about Lydia. Since happiness has no history, I excuse myself from describing that week.

On the eve of my departure the old depression seized me. The thought which I had been suppressing so far, forced itself on my consciousness; I realised that whether I was strained or natural, whether I loved her with real or artificial love, I should never win her heart. She was my friend, she liked me, and she wanted to love me—I could see how she tried—but she just could not. And I also understood that I had to give her up, this time for good.

The evening was still and sultry; a thunderstorm was gathering. We sat on the steps of the veranda and looked at the huge yellow moon rising from behind the trees of the park.

"Three months ago," I said, "a woman foretold this night to me. Only she thought it was the past, whereas it was the future."

Lydia said nothing. She sat with a wistful look in her eyes, cupping her chin in her palms. I felt misery getting the better of me, and rose.

"It's late, you should go to bed," I said. "Good-bye. And this time it's good-bye for ever."

She did not ask me why. She knew. She gave me her hand, and the light of sympathy and pity in her eyes told me that she approved of my decision. And then I broke down. Sinking on the steps I sobbed and raved, kissing her fingers and beating my head against the steps to alleviate the other, non-physical pain. She stroked my head. "Don't, my dear, don't," she repeated, her voice trembling with tears. . . .

Early next morning I went back to Petersburg.

Why is it that this evening was and still is one of the memories I treasure most, on a level with a week, the happiest week in my life, which I spent years later in a little village by the Black Sea? The readers who have taken in Tavrov's ideas will know why.

Soon it was all over with Katya. She was as dear to me as before, but to be with her had become a torment; the light of love in her eyes seared me with shame. It was silly that that feeling should have appeared just now when the other girl had gone out of my life, but there it was. The curve of emotion does not conform itself to logical rules. I pitied her, but I could not get near her: pain, my pain, stood between us and drove me away from her. I asked her to marry me. She shook her head. "Oh no, Kolya, that won't do," she said, almost in fright, and, lifting my hand, kissed it. When I was leaving that day we both knew that it was the end.

As long as I live I shall not forget the unbearable beauty of suffering that shone in her last look.

Katya did me a great service: she gave me a taste for genuineness. She was not educated; she could not always follow the complex workings of a sophisticated mind like mine; but she knew better than I how to be herself—always true to herself—and how to discriminate between sincerity and pretence, the real and the bogus. In later years my wife strengthened that discrimination in me, and now when



I meet people, the first question that arises in my mind is: Are they genuine? If they are not, I am bored with them, be they ever so clever and bright and charming: I simply do not know what to do with them. Which may be a correct philosophical attitude, but certainly tends to restrict one's circle of acquaintances.

When I told Tavrov that I was going to Egypt he was very surprised.

"But why Egypt? What is Hecuba to Egypt and vice versa? If Hecuba is dying for dates she can get them at that fruit shop round the corner, the one with the plump pineapple painted on the board."

I told him my reasons for going. He shook his head in disapproval.

"Do you really think that a locomotive plus a steamer can mend the wounds of a human soul by moving its bearer to a different latitude? You are violating your nature; see if it doesn't take revenge on you!" Words which at the time seemed mere rhetoric to me. What mattered was that I should regain my inner balance, and everybody, except Tavrov, that incorrigible dreamer, knew that travelling was the best cure for a broken heart.

I did go to Egypt. I sat on the poop of the boat with my back to the teeming passengers and half-heartedly enjoyed the beauty of the emerald sea. In Constantinople I explored the narrow smelly lanes of Galata, and felt curiously at home in these Asiatic surroundings. At the Piræus, when the passengers rushed off by tram to Athens, I walked the other way along the coast and spent two days in rocky desolation, bathing and climbing. The Pyramids looked exceedingly stupid, but some of the sights I saw in the native quarter of Cairo were quite interesting, especially a dancing girl, a Hindu. The memory of that girl went back with me to Petersburg. Every night she came to dance for me, and sometimes she was tall and slim like Lydia, but usually she was Katya in disguise. After the dance I would come up to her, she would throw her bare arms round

my neck, press herself to me, and with trembling fingers I would help her to undress, maddened by the glimpses of her white body. . . .

Opposite the back entrance of the house in which Katya lived was a tobacco shop with a recess in front of it, and there I found myself one airless August evening. I had stood there for an hour, smoking one cigarette after another. I knew I was doing the basest thing man can do, but I could not leave the place.

When Katya came out, I let her go a little way, then I overtook her.

"Hullo!" I said, in assumed surprise, and my voice sounded strange and false to me.

She stared at me dumbly. She had changed: her face had become thinner, her cheek-bones more prominent, her eyes larger and deeper.

"I've just come from Tavrov's," I lied. "How are you getting on?"

"I'm all right," she answered tonelessly. The dry sadness of her voice pierced me with pity, but the next moment pity was swamped by desire, and itself became desire. I walked beside her, asking her trifling questions, and knowing that all I said was a lie, because it was only said to reassert my physical power over her. We reached the tram stop. Her tram came almost at once; but she did not board it, she remained staring in front of her.

I seized her by the arm.

"Go, Katya, go quick!" I said, trembling. "You must go! Please!"

She did not move, seemed not to hear me. The conductor rang the bell, the tram went. A cab was passing; I lifted my arm. . . .

In the morning, after she had left the gaudy hotel bedroom, I lay for a long time in bed gazing at the pictures of nude women on the walls and wishing myself dead. I understood then why Tavrov had warned me against my flight to Egypt. I had tried to get off cheaply, I had tried to escape pain, and I was hit by the recoil of my own action.



## PART THREE



## PEACE AND WAR

**M**Y recovery progressed rapidly. For three years I had been living in a state of abnormal tension and I was emotionally played out. And when I came across the Bhagavad-Gita, the gospel of our Lord Krishna, so wonderfully akin in spirit to the New Testament but infinitely superior to it in philosophical clarity, I was lifted right out of myself.

The Lord Krishna says:

"I am the self existing in the heart of all beings. I am the birth, the life, and the death of things.

"Among sages I am the most ancient; in sacrifice I am the invocation; among the ranges I am Himalaya.

"I am the glory of the woman, her fame, her grace, her memory, her constancy and her forgiveness.

"I am the chastiser's rod and the cunning of the conqueror; the knowledge of those who know, and the secret of secrets. I am silence. . . ."

And this is what Lord Krishna says of man and man's self:

"That which is born is subject to certain death; that which dies is subject to certain birth; and the unavoidable should give no cause for grief.

"As a man casts off his old garment and dons a new one, so the self casts off its outworn embodiment and enters into a new form.

"Weapons cut not that self, fire burns it not, water wets it not. That which is the self is beyond all harm."

To Arjuna's question: What induces man to commit sin? the Blessed One replies thus:

"It is desire, anger born of the longing for power, born of passion, born of ignorance.

"The thought of a thing creates attachment; out of attachment grows longing; out of longing, passion. Passion creates delusion, and delusion breaks up the continuity of mind.

"Therefore be steadfast in devotion but perform thine acts without attachment, remaining unconcerned with success or failure."

And finally these words, the deepest ever written by man or God, words which seem childishly simple until one starts working them out, and then . . . well, I know that it took me twenty years to see only the range of their implication:

"The Lord regards not merit or demerit, nor do men suffer because of sin, but because their knowledge is veiled with ignorance.

"But ignorance is destroyed by the *knowledge of self*; through it the Supreme reveals Himself."

I plunged into Yoga. It offered me that solid basis for thinking which I had sought in vain in the world of Western thought. For the Yogis are realists; they base their reasoning not on any abstract ideas but on facts, normal psychological facts. So did Socrates, but then one cannot get at Socrates himself through the fog of Platonic idealism. Christ did it, of course, but we only know Christ through fourth-hand translations and the contradictory interpretations of a legion of—mostly unintelligent—theologians. Nietzsche too did it—poor Nietzsche, who was not strong enough to stand his own genius and broke down under the weight of his own ideas. As for the "orthodox" philosophers of the past and the present, including the biggest of them, they never came near understanding life, for they all started not from psychological facts but from cerebral speculations: their preoccupation was not with living men but with their own systems, sophisticated crossword puzzles which bear no relation whatsoever to man's suffering and his yearning for inner stability. When I think of the tons of nebulous mediæval casuistry and the shiploads of senseless verbiage which is produced by Wise Chickens of all ages and

all countries, which officially passes for Philosophy and is crammed—heaven knows why—into the minds of thousands of eager young people of whom hardly five per cent have ever heard the name of the Bhagavad-Gita, and less than one per cent have read it, I feel inclined to agree with Bernard Shaw that the best thing we can do with our Universities is to dynamite them.

Yoga gave me that poise of mind which I badly needed. The Russian nature being half Oriental, the method of Yoga, which is introspection, came natural to me. Through Yoga I realised why my brooding had been futile so far: I had been endeavouring, all by myself, with my intuition only, without the help of wiser men, to master the subtlest knowledge there is. No wonder I had only muddled myself up.

Of course, I read Yoga far too greedily to take it in with the detachment which it demands. Also, I was too young for it; much of what I read I could not digest, and the rest I did not know how to apply to practical life. Had I then met someone to guide me in that new world of spirit as Tavrov had guided me through the jungle of relationships, I should have been spared a lot of pain in the future—pain I caused to myself and to others. But teachers of that kind are as rare as geniuses; I did not meet one.

Still, the contact with the serenity of the Eastern thought did me a lot of good. As will be seen from the subsequent chapters, the line of my life begins to straighten out from now on. It still goes in loops and zigzags, but on the whole it keeps closer to its ideal direction, meaning by "ideal" that direction which I was to take ultimately. I continue to make mistakes, of course, but except for one episode in 1933 they are mistakes of execution rather than of aim.

It was young Princess Uktomsky, the wife of a friend of mine, who had lent me the Bhagavad-Gita. Both husband and wife had something Oriental about them. Uktomsky looked exactly like a Hindu rajah of the pure Aryan stock; he was the only European I know who could sit in the proper



Buddha position, with the legs crossed under him in such a way as to make the soles face right up. His wife studied Sanskrit and read Max Müller's Upanishads: she also sang (not well) and imitated peasant women (admirably).

Uktomsky Senior, my friend's father, was even more Oriental than his son. He had lived many years in the Far East, had accompanied Nicholas II, then heir to the throne, on his ill-fated journey to Japan, and had many friends amongst eminent Asiatics. His house, huge and neglected, was a museum; one could hardly move in the drawing-room for the Chinese, Japanese and Indian porcelain and ivory. An enormous ebony throne, a personal present from the last Empress of China, stood in the middle; the walls were covered with mediæval embroideries; a thick layer of dust lay on everything. Another room contained a big wire cage with two medium-sized crocodiles in it; whilst one of them slept, the other always kept watch with one eye open. A gigantic cockatoo strolled freely about the flat, croaking gruffly to himself. Every morning at eight—apparently he never went wrong more than five minutes either way—he would enter the bedroom of the old Princess, hop on to her bed, and with his three-inch beak lift her eyelid saying: "Good morning, Mummie." There had also been a boa constrictor, but they had had to give it away—he caused too much trouble. One spring day, attracted by the sunshine, he got inside the double frame of a window and twisted and twitched there till a crowd collected in the street. As the house was situated right opposite the Political Prison the police grew alarmed, Cossacks were summoned, and there was nearly bloodshed. On another occasion the boa vanished from his room, vanished completely. The servants left in a panic; the old prince and princess had to make breakfast for themselves and eat in a restaurant. One day a terrible yell resounded in the house, and the prince as he came out into the corridor was nearly knocked down by a man madly running towards the exit. It was a *frotteur*, a man engaged to wax the parquet. He had been working in a spare room and had moved a bed, when something plopped heavily on to the floor, and he beheld a

three-yard-long boa angrily hissing at him. The boa, it appeared, had been hiding between the mattress and the wire of the bedstead: snakes always choose a tight place for shedding their skin.

At the young Uktomskys' I met an interesting man, Groot. He looked very *distingué* indeed: supercilious hawklike face, short beard, sharp steely eyes—a mediæval knight. He was *tout ce qu'il y a de plus chic*, and proportionately snobbish. He had long carefully groomed finger-nails, and only talked French, his conversation turning on such subjects as Pavlova and Karsavina, the health of the Empress Dowager, and the latest *Concours Hippique*. He was a man of mystery: after a month in Petersburg he would disappear for a year, he would not say where. Only indirectly, through his father's Asiatic friends, did Uktomsky know a little about Groot's doings. His hobby was Asia, neither more nor less. One year he would travel in some inaccessible part of China (he was a Mandarin of the Second Class); another he would be prospecting for gold in the Amur region; then he would be seen in Turkestan or Mongolia, always with a bodyguard of four Mongols who were ready to cut anyone's throat at his bidding and grumbled at his riding too fast. He owned immense areas of pasture land in Uryan Khai (Altai) and a Buddhist monastery on the border of Thibet, to which he proposed to retire in due time. One day the Uktomskys received a hamper from him full of exquisite Chinese silk which must have cost a fortune. A note was lying on the top: in precious French, Groot expressed the humble hope that *la chère Princesse daignera accepter ce petit souvenir de son fidèle ami*.

He married a Siberian girl, and they spent their honeymoon riding round the Baikal Sea, a journey of some 1200 miles across a grim stony desert.

"How do you like this?" Uktomsky asked me one day, showing me a poem in an illustrated magazine. The poem, signed Tsertelev, was a short lyrical piece about lilies of the valley and moonshine, but it had something in it which made me say: "I should like to meet the author."

That, since the author happened to be Uktomsky's brother-in-law, presented no difficulties. "Let's go and see him now," said Uktomsky, and we went. It was early in the afternoon.

Prince Yuri Tsertelev was a swarthy boy of nineteen, very alive and intelligent. At tea we talked about poetry and I said that poetry would be dead in fifty years' time. What nonsense! cried Yuri, and we had a long and heated argument which ended by his mother reminding him that it was time to change: they were dining early, as they were going to the opera. She was an affable lady, a *grande dame*, but without stiffness. "Perhaps you would care to come with us," she said to me. "It's *Parsifal* to-night, and we have a free seat in our box." Whereupon I rushed home to change and joined them at the theatre.

I had been at the opera a great deal but had not heard *Parsifal*, and it made a shattering impression on me. At a certain phrase for the 'cello in Act One, when the wounded Amfortas is brought in, I started crying. All I could do was not to make any noise, and I went on crying till the end of the act.

After the opera when I was having tea with the Tsertelevs at their flat I apologised to the Princess for my lack of restraint.

"Oh, that's quite all right," she said simply. "As a matter of fact I rather liked it. There is nothing more hateful than listening to music with people who don't feel it. . . . But it shows that Wagner had struck a wrong direction in *Parsifal*."

"Why?"

"His music is too emotional. He has rendered suffering too realistically, so that instead of elevating you above your pain he drags you back to it."

That was just what *Parsifal* had done to me. "But why is it wrong?" I asked.

"Because that isn't the province of art—not of the true art. *King Lear* or *Hamlet* doesn't make you cry, and *La Dame aux Camélias* does. Why? Because Dumas isn't great enough to lift us above pain as Shakespeare does."

"No, that only means that Shakespeare wrote tragedies and Dumas dramas."

"No, it means that one is a better artist than the other." When the Princess was carried away by some subject—and art was her hobby—two pink spots appeared on her cheeks, and she looked years younger.

Then Yuri stepped in with his theory of art, and the Princess retired, admonishing us not to stay too late. "I'll go in five minutes," I said—and left at three in the morning.

I have described this first visit of mine to the Tsertelevs' at length because it is typical of the unconventional Russian way. You met someone, and if you liked each other, formalities were at once put aside, you did as the spirit moved you. That applied not only to the Intelligentsia but to the upper classes as well, except for the aristocracy of the Court spheres. These were essentially non-Russian; they belonged to the Western civilisation, they had Western manners, the Western snobbishness, and the Western outlook on life—a distinction which can be clearly seen in Tolstoy's novels: Anna Karenina and the Rostovs could only be Russians, whereas Vronsky, Hélène Bezuhov and Prince Andrey might be Germans, Frenchmen or Englishmen.

Through the Tsertelevs I had a glimpse of that de-Russianised *beau monde*, the First International. It did not attract me at all; its stiffness and mannerisms bored me and made me feel stupid. I had arguments on that score with the Princess. She, who had been brought up in that circle, simply could not see what I objected to: its unreal preoccupations and its stultifying worship of convention were to her but an expression of self-control and high culture. One day I shocked her badly by expounding to her the plan of a society based not on hereditary privileges and money but on merit and service. My speech, I remember, sounded strange to my own ears: I had never suspected myself of having such advanced opinions. The Princess stiffened.

"You're talking like a Mirabeau," she said ironically. "I hope you don't really mean it."

I laughed. "Not quite," I admitted. That was insincere,

but I did not want to antagonise her. I was deeply attached to her, her piano-playing was first-rate, and—a feature individually mine—I particularly valued her friendship for the criticism I used to get from her. She used to pull me up, and not always gently, for my intolerance, my tendency to judge people too quickly, and the aggressive manner in which I delivered my judgments.

That year I saw half a dozen performances of *Parsifal*. It became a kind of sport with me to make myself hear it detachedly and not through my emotions, but I never achieved that. The moment the 'celli started crying, tears would fill my eyes and keep flowing till the curtain fell on Act One. I still do not know whether *Parsifal* is great music or merely moving music: to me it is the symbol and the sublimation of the pain I had known in the first years of my free life. Known and caused.

Work in the Ministry was degenerating into routine; all impetus had gone out of it, killed by Kiesel, the horselike Director. Perforce I adopted Tit's cynical advice: not to worry about what could not be altered. I worked just enough to keep things—and myself—going. Kiesel's system of multiple committees had at least this advantage: that when asked why you had not been to one, you could always say you were getting ready for another.

At that time I was offered the post of Assistant Secretary to the Minister, but as I did not like the diplomatic functions it involved, I asked the Minister for permission to decline the honour. Permission was granted. Tit threw up his arms. "I've never met such a cretin in my life!" he cried. "They ought to use your head for driving in piles, it's no good for anything else."

I met Irène at an extremely aristocratic and stiff banquet. She was a harpist, and very silly indeed. Taken singly, every feature in her face was beautiful, but her eyes were placed half an inch lower than they ought to be, and that completely

ruined the ensemble. To while away the time I talked irresponsible nonsense, which pleased her so much that she asked me to see her home. I did, and was rewarded with a cup of tea and French biscuits. On my second visit she grew confidential: she told me about a naval lieutenant who had been engaged to her and then had jilted her. "I don't know why," she said, with disarming naivety. She cried a little over that reminiscence, then she wiped her eyes, and put her arms round my neck. "You aren't like him, Nikolai, are you?" she asked. I said indignantly "No!", kissed her chastely on the forehead, and left, never to return.

Just because I kept away from women, two more girls grew interested in me. The first case is not amusing, the second is. Olga and I soon became fast friends. She was a vivacious girl, witty, gay and always on the move. She and her friend Tanya used to give interesting performances of thought-reading with a simplified planchette: a saucer would be placed upside down on a sheet of paper with letters drawn on it in a circle; they would cross their fingers on the saucer, and it would dart from one letter to another spelling words, which were an answer to my question. I did not need to ask questions aloud: the saucer read them as soon as they were formulated in my mind. The girls did not even look at the paper: they chatted and laughed the whole time whilst I noted down the letters as they came out. Once I asked them about Tavrov, whom neither of them had seen. The answer came forth at once, and was couched in Tavrov's own inimitable style, with references to earthquakes and wrinkled dates and slim alligators: a perfect *pastiche*. The girls could not explain how they did it; they were not really interested in the thing.

One evening in May—Olga's parents had gone abroad—she asked me to her flat. We had supper, then went to her study and settled on the sofa. The subdued light in the study made her lyrical; she talked first about friendship, then about love, and gave me her hand to hold. Somewhat later I found that her head was resting on my shoulder, and later still I had to kiss her. But that was not enough for her; she wanted

more and was most unambiguous about it. Now, I was then recovering from gastric influenza, and periodically a wave of nauseous weakness would sweep over me, making it difficult to talk and ruling out anything beyond mild kissing. Of course, I ought to have told her frankly about my state; but my manliness objected to such a confession; also, I was afraid of hurting her feelings. So I assumed the noble role. I said it would be caddish of me to avail myself of her defencelessness. She said I need not worry, and gave certain valid reasons why. I was adamant. She tried to wear down my virtuous resistance and failed. When those nasty fits of weakness came over me I simulated a dramatic conflict between Passion and Duty and begged her—very sincerely indeed—to have mercy on me. At dawn I fell asleep in her arms on the sofa—the maternal instinct must have been strong in her.

August, 1914. The Tsertelevs' estate: the wide yellow steppe; a grey road winding its course through it; by the road, a crooked telegraph post, and a white square of paper stuck on it. The War! . . . Scenes between Yuri, who wanted to join the army before it had taken Berlin, and his mother, who insisted on his finishing at the University first. Since I had had pneumonia a month earlier I felt weak and un-martial; and since only sons in Russia were exempt from conscription I was not called up.

A fortnight later I returned to Petersburg. Most of my friends, including Tit, were in the army already. They lived in smelly barracks, had six hours' drill a day, pierced imaginary Germans with bayonets, and took cover in the puddles. I thought I could do better than that, and applied to the Artillery Academy. The vacancies were all filled, but thanks to the intervention of my godfather, an extra vacancy was made for me. I ordered a pair of smart riding boots and went to be medically examined. "Read this," said the doctor, pointing at a piece of cardboard with letters of various sizes. I read. "Now the other one," and, coming up to me,

he shut my right eye. I remained silent: my left eye is hopelessly astigmatic. "Off with you," said the doctor.

I gave my smart riding boots away, and sulked. If the army did not want me, they might bloody well do without me. I continued to work at the Ministry, call on the Tsertelevs, and see *Parsifal*. But the war kept calling me and haunting me—not the glory of it, not victorious attacks or St. George's Cross, but the endurance, the exhausting marches, the participation in the common suffering. And two months later I joined a Red Cross detachment that was going to the front, my idea being to pass from it straight into the trenches: it could be done in Russia.

The Galician army, to which we were attached, was, when we arrived, manœuvring for position. There was a lull in the fighting; not a shot was heard; and for a month our detachment did nothing but wander vaguely in the rear, from one dirty Jewish village to another. The weather was foul—the Carpathians are a famous place for winds; it rained "cats and dogs," and the excellent Austrian roads had been turned into quagmires by the artillery.

The Chief of our detachment was a patriotic bureaucrat of sixty. He drove in front of us in a cabriolet, and, seen from behind, looked a perfect square, on account of half a dozen rain- and fur-coats he had on. He dozed on the march; when we stopped, he would say to his assistant: "You'll see to everything, will you?" and would hurry into a hut, to sleep.

I was the supply officer of the detachment. One of my duties consisted in requisitioning hay and oats from the peasants, and a hateful job it was. They were very poor; they badly needed what forage they had for their starving cattle; and the roubles I offered were of no value to them. They would fling the notes on the ground; I would talk myself hoarse explaining and persuading; as that did not help, I would finally say to my men: "Take the stuff," and as often as not, an ugly scene would ensue. Once an old woman hit me on the neck with a stick.

In the towns, the supply problem was simpler. There were still large stocks of forage available there, and it could be



bought in the ordinary way, through grain dealers. My first deal was highly instructive. When the sacks of oats were counted and loaded, the agent produced a receipt form and asked me: "How much shall I add?"

I did not understand. What did he mean by "adding"?

"Oh, the usual thing," he said. "Your commission, of course."

I grew red in the face, and said I wanted no commission. He gave me a queer look; it took him some time to realise that I meant that. Very well, then, since I insisted . . . and with a shrug he wrote out the receipt for the amount actually delivered.

After that we went to a café, and I got him talking. Being Russian, he was frank, and called a spade a spade. The war, he said, was a godsend to him.

"True, business isn't so good as it was during the Japanese war," he said. "Then the supply officers did just what they liked. They would buy fifteen tons and pay, say, 800 roubles, and I would make out a receipt for one hundred tons and 7000 roubles, on which I had my ten per cent commission: 700 roubles earned in half an hour's time! Now they're more careful, the old daring's gone. Now if they buy fifteen tons, the receipt is usually for twenty-five or thirty, not more, so that I only earn one-tenth of what I used to."

"Do they all do it?" I asked.

"There may be exceptions, but I've not come across any. Of course, some of the young ones are rather clumsy about it at first, they haven't got the training, so they're sort of confused and afraid of adding too much. But they'll soon learn."

He may have exaggerated, I cannot tell. But I do know that the financial management of our detachment was peculiar, to say the least. No books of any kind were kept; when something had to be bought, the assistant, a singularly unpleasant young man, would pull a fat bundle of notes—thousands of roubles—out of his pocket and ask me: "How much?" And when I gave him a receipt he would pocket it without so much as glancing at it. I am sure he did well out of his job; and I am equally sure that the others thought the same about me.

The whole of November, 1914, we spent in aimless wanderings amidst the desolation of the rear. Then in December our army advanced and our detachment followed in its wake over the Carpathians into the Hungarian plain. At last things began to happen. There was a gunshot in the distance, then another, and soon a proper cannonade broke out. Our doctors unpacked their leather cases with viciously shining knives: after the demoralising struggle with mud and boredom they obviously enjoyed the prospect of slashing at human flesh. The sound of the cannonade moved nearer; a battery took up its position right behind our carts and started firing above our heads (a very unpleasant sensation) at some invisible target. For the first time we saw our Chief wide awake. Where was the staff? he worried, rushing to and fro, stumbling in his heavy coats. Where could he get his instructions? Should we retreat? He sent me to consult the O.C. of the battery. I went and saw an angry-looking Colonel sitting on a stump with a binocular to his eyes. In answer to my question he said, very distinctly and without lowering the binocular: "I don't care if you go to hell, and the quicker the better."

As I was reporting his answer to the Chief I saw a pretty white puff jump out of the immaculately blue Hungarian sky. I was going to ask: What is this? when a sharp bang came from the puff, and something like hail fell clattering in the bushes. Another puff and another bang. In a few minutes things became quite lively. A cloud of smoke rose from a building lower down on the slope; then a shed on our right crumpled up slowly and hesitatingly. Our horses, unused to fireworks of this kind, attempted a stampede; the battery behind us took off at a gallop. "Retreat! Retreat!" yelled our Chief frantically waving his arms. The doctors were shutting their leather cases, grumbling into their beards; the men rushed to the carts.

By the time we left the yard it looked as though we were surrounded. Down below in the valley our infantry was retreating past us, and through field-glasses one could see the blue coats of the Austrians advancing on a ridge above us.

The white puffs had moved further away to the rear, probably following our battery; from all sides came the clatter of rifle and machine-gun fire. "Hurry up, hurry up!" yelled the Chief from his cabriolet, making a megaphone of his hands. It was so exciting that one did not think of danger at all.

Now, it happened that an hour earlier two of our carts had gone to a neighbouring village to borrow some oats from another Red Cross detachment. They had to be fetched back, and I volunteered for the job. I mounted my horse—having first placed it against the wall, since it used to side away just as I lifted my leg to the stirrup—and rode off. The road I took—a sinuous track between wooded hills—was quite deserted. I rode on, looking at the blue sky, listening to the whine of the bullets that passed somewhere above me, and feeling thrilled at the thought that this was real war, when at a sharp turn of the track I suddenly beheld, within not more than ten yards of me, a Red Honved (Hungarian Hussar) standing with a carbine in his hands in the middle of the road. My horse must have been as surprised as myself, for it stopped dead. "So that's how one gets taken prisoner," flitted through my mind. I felt no fear, only an incredulous astonishment; no, that was too simple, too senseless to be true, I must be dreaming!

Flight was out of the question: he would have riddled me with bullets before I had time to turn my opinionate horse. Nor could I attack him. I had a revolver with me, but in the first place, it was so far back on my belt that it would take me fully a minute to get at it, and secondly, I had used all the cartridges to shoot wounded horses on the way. So we stood staring at each other. The Honved was a swarthy man with a fleshy inexpressive face and a long nose equally thick all the way through. The odd thing was that he too did nothing, and after a while that began to worry me.

"Hey! what are you doing here?" I shouted at him in authoritative German.

He neither answered nor stirred. Since a good Hungarian makes a point of not knowing any German, I tried him in French, with the same result. Then I repeated my question

in Russian; he seemed not to hear me. That unnerved me completely, I wished he would do something, if it were only to shoot at me. Why the devil didn't he? Was he waiting for his comrades to join him? Or was he afraid that someone might be coming to my help?

Either my horse understood the situation better than I did or it simply grew tired of standing still; anyhow, it moved on of its own accord, bringing me within a yard of the Honved, and stopped again. The Honved stared at me; it was a blank gaze which certainly had nothing hostile in it. The suspense became unbearable; I simply had to do something, so I produced my cigarette case and offered it to the Honved. He took a cigarette, rather eagerly, I thought. And then a great light dawned on me: I realised that it was I who had taken him prisoner and not the other way round. An immense relief swept through me; now I knew my duty.

"Give it me," I said, pointing at his carbine.

He glanced at it, and by his look I saw that he had not grasped my meaning. As I was just a little too far away from him to reach him, I spurred my horse. But it happened to be in a playful mood, and, instead of moving nearer the Honved, it jerked in the opposite direction, nearly throwing me off the saddle. A slow grin appeared on the man's face, and I hated him for that. In annoyance I spurred the horse once more, whereupon the beast made a complete *volte-face*, and I found myself with my back to my prisoner. I distinctly heard him giggle—a stupid vulgar giggle.

And then I saw a sight which filled my heart with joy: from behind the corner of the road Syomkin, one of our men, was coming up on horseback (he had been sent after me to tell me that the carts I was looking for were back already). On seeing the Honved, his horse stopped, and Syomkin's face underwent the same change which mine must have undergone a few minutes before. Anyhow, it looked very stupid.

"Don't be afraid," I said patronisingly. "He's our prisoner. Get down and take his rifle."

Syomkin was not a fool like that Honved: he understood my meaning at once. He jumped off the saddle, came up to

the Honved and took his carbine. "Come along," he said sternly, and gave the man a gentle push: "You are our prisoner, see?"

The Honved saw; he nodded in a businesslike manner, and we started.

An hour later we delivered him at Brigade Headquarters. As there was no need for me to hurry back I stayed at H.Q. while they questioned the Honved. His story was pathetic in a way. The Austrians had indeed broken through our line in one place, and he had been sent to reconnoitre in our rear. But as he was coming down the hill towards the track along which I was riding, a bullet killed his horse. That was the end of the war for him: his horse was his best friend, without whom he would not fight; so he had gone down to the track and waited there for someone to surrender to.

Our detachment retreated. Up the Carpathians, down the Carpathians, and away from the Carpathians, into the plain. There was no holding us. We overtook the infantry, then the artillery; the sound of the firing grew fainter and fainter; we went on retreating. The ammunition depots, the reserve trenches, the supply columns were left behind; still we marched on and on. The men winked at each other gaily and said we were going to the Urals; the Chief said we must reorganise in peace; and I said I was leaving the detachment. As in all difficulties, he sent for his unpleasant assistant.

"You can't leave," said the assistant. "You're in the army, you know."

"It doesn't look like it, does it?" I retorted. "In any case I am leaving."

"That's desertion; you'll be court-martialled."

"I don't care whether it's desertion or not. And as for courts martial, should it come to that I'll tell them exactly all I know."

That was bluff, for which I had carefully prepared the ground in advance by bragging to him about the highly influential people I knew in Petersburg.

"If you go I'll have to report you as a deserter," he per-

sisted. But I knew he would not do that, and at the first railway station I left the detachment.

"I think I'll do the same," said one of the M.O.s when I parted from him. "It's a fishy detachment."

## PETROGRAD

AT the Ministry of Agriculture there was nothing to do. Most of the provincial staff had been called up, and the rest were buying grain for the army. Dremine's plan was forgotten. I called on my godfather, the high dignitary, and asked him to help me to get into the Supply Department of the War Office, which was a hotbed of bribery. If I had failed to fight the Austrians I might at least fight corruption.

"Don't be silly," said the old man. "They've been stealing since Noah's time; they've worked out a perfect technique against which God Almighty Himself is powerless, let alone a baby like you. And should you by any chance catch out one of them, they'll easily find means of trapping you, and where will you be then?"

He was right, of course, so I abandoned my heroic plan and applied for a job in the Secretariat of the Supreme War Council. That was arranged, and I was given the job of keeping the minutes of the meetings.

The War Council—its full name occupied two and a half lines—supervised the whole of the supplies of the army, including the purchase of munitions from England and the U.S.A. It consisted of the Minister of War, the President of the Duma, half a dozen members of the Duma, and representatives of certain Ministries and County Councils. At the meetings they spoke freely about the situation, and one learnt many unofficial truths about Russia's military impotence and the fantastic inefficiency of the Government. They made allusions, veiled at first, then less and less ambiguous and restrained, to treason in high places, sinister influences at the Court, the necessity for a radical change of the régime. . . . It was interesting, instructive, and very depressing.

In the room with me worked Leo Zotov, an Old Boy, a tall, lean youngster with a weak mouth and spasmodic movements, a neurasthenic with a touch of genius. Without having

had one music lesson he could reproduce on the piano, by ear, whole tunes which he had heard only once. At the Lytzey he had never worked properly for the exams: he just used to glance through the textbook. I remember him at the age of sixteen reading—for fun—Mendeleyev's *High Chemistry*, his other favourite book being the *Almanach de Gotha*, the Lord knows why, since he certainly was not a snob. He wrote first-rate poetry, jotting it down on torn envelopes or bits of wrapping paper. There was enough stuff in him to become one of the leading poets in Russia, but he never printed a line, partly because he hated the idea of marketing his inspiration and partly because he always lost his poems. He was in the full sense of the word a poet by the grace of God. One evening he, Prince Yuri and Uktomsky were at my flat heatedly discussing some abstruse subject, when Zotov, who was talking the loudest, suddenly rushed off to my desk, snatched a pencil, and on my blotting-paper scribbled down the first twelve lines of a sonnet: they had come to him in a flash, all ready, whilst he was haranguing.

He had conservative views, an admiration for strength in any form—characteristic of weak people—and a complexion which varied from white to green according to the amount of wine, ether and other mild drugs he had inhaled or swallowed. No wonder that at the Lytzey he had had a beastly time in spite of his intelligence, his versatility, and his gentle affectionate nature. To talk to him for ten minutes was a treat; after half an hour you began to itch all over; after two hours you were ready for murder.

He provided our section with a lot of entertainment. The curtain usually rose on his losing a letter. It had been there, on his desk; he had just had it in his hands, and yet it had vanished, inexplicably, mysteriously! With a groan he would attack the disorderly heap of papers before him, applying to them the process known in agriculture as Winnowing, i.e., throwing them high up into the air in the hope that as they dropped the lost letter would turn up. It never did. "Oh, my God!" Leo would groan, with an expression of acute suffering, plopping down into the chair, stretching out his



legs, throwing his head back and gasping for air. "My heart! It's wrong again! Terrible! Horrible!"

Someone comes up to him and produces the unfortunate letter: Leo has left it on the window-sill or in the lavatory. With a rush life comes back to his prostrate body; he sits up as if propelled by a spring, stares at the letter with a joyous surprise, then a kind, apologetic smile illuminates his face. "Oh, thank you so much!" he says with enormous feeling. "So terribly nice of you!" He puts the letter before him, writes the reply—afterwards the typists will swear obscenely, trying to decipher his hieroglyphics—and suddenly seizes his head. "Oh, that cursed circular!" he moans. He jumps up, his chair falls with a clatter, some papers flutter down on to the floor; he hurts his shin against the desk, swears at it, and with a gait that may be described as accelerated shuffling, rushes for the door.

This shambling gait of his was a result of the paralysis, or rather semi-paralysis, which he had had the year before. He had had to walk on crutches until a certain M. Honoré, a psychic dealer and for once not a charlatan, cured him. Honoré put him into a hypnotic sleep, then woke him and told him to jump. Leo jumped, higher than he had ever done. Throwing his crutches away, he rushed to the Lytzey Club and demonstrated his fitness to us, running round the table and performing other gymnastic exercises. He also showed us a silver rouble which Honoré had given him and which, when Leo looked at it, made the whole of his left side insensitive to pain. "Try it," he said, baring his left arm, and we tried; while he looked at the magic rouble we pinched his arm and pricked it with pins. As that made no impression on him we extinguished a cigarette on his skin (burning flesh has a nasty sweetish smell). "I feel something warm," said Leo, smiling happily. Other friends came in, and the demonstration had to be repeated again and again, until by the end of the evening his arm was all spotted with burns like a snake skin. Yet in two days all the burns healed, without any pain or blisters. Once, in Germany, wishing to show off before Elli and Leni, I had extinguished a cigarette—one

only—on my forearm; it had cost me a sleepless night and a week's bother with blisters.

At my flat Leo used to give table-turning séances. I broke the chain at the first séance when the table wished to speak to me and proceeded to spell Zoya's name. But usually the table spoke to Leo, promising him Happiness, Resurrection, New Life, and other nice things, all of which were to come through Love. The name of the girl was given who was to perform these miracles: Irina. "You know her," intimated the table, whereupon Leo flew into a fit of rage: the only Irina he knew was a shrivelled, thin-lipped spinster. "It's a damned lie!" he cried, but the table repeated inexorably: "Irina! Irina! You know her."

A month after this séance Leo arrived at my flat in a state of ecstatic collapse, and smelling strongly of ether.

"I've met her!" he announced, flopping down on the sofa and panting. "It's amazing! Unbelievable! Of course I knew her, only it was long ago, I'd forgotten her name."

"Whom are you talking about?"

"Irina, of course! Oh, she's an absolute brick, a marvel! And what style! Her family comes from one of the Tamerlane's satraps; I'm going to see her now." He snatched some pills from his pocket, swallowed them, and rushed out, leaving muddy traces on my carpet and a score of Scriabin's *Poème d'extase* on my hall table. God help the girl, I thought. And I thought that again when somewhat later I met her: they were engaged then. For she was not at all the futuristic green-faced poetess I had imagined her to be, but a healthy, good-looking girl with refined features and kind eyes. Her name was Shan Ghyrey; she lived with her family in a huge cold house which was rather poorly furnished but had an unmistakable *cachet*. At supper Leo held her hand under the table and looked idiotic with bliss. He prodded vaguely at a sardine—half of it went past his mouth on to the tablecloth and the floor—he spilt his tea, wriggled on his chair, and slurred his words in his excitement. Didn't she see that he was a wreck? I wondered.

Just as we were leaving, her sister Nadya arrived. "That's a

Real Girl," was my very first thought when I saw her. She was tall and slim, with a natural dignity of carriage. From her Tartar ancestors she had inherited high cheek-bones and the tender oval of the face; from her mother, beautiful luminous eyes with a startled look in them which reminded one of a shy doe. It was, I remember, the peculiar blend of the childish and womanly which struck me most in her face. She had come from a meeting—she was a schoolmistress—and looked very tired.

In the cab Leo told me about the Shan Ghyreys. They were of very old stock, descendants of Ghyrey, the Tartar Khan of the Golden Horde, Tamerlane's right hand. The family had been rich once, had owned vast tracts of land, but it was gone the way all Russian wealth went, and now the girls—there were three of them—had to work. Their mother, he said, was a saint, and in general they were wonderful and amazing people. I saw him to his digs, went home, and had a rotten night with one continuous nightmare, all about the Shan Ghyreys' dark sinister house. I was in that house, locked in, unable to get out, and dreadful things were happening: either the walls closed on me, or I discovered an assassin hiding under the grand piano, or I stumbled over a corpse.

In May Leo's wedding took place. Being his best man, I called on him to take him to church, and found him in a state of tremendous agitation, suffocating in an inordinately high collar, drinking bromide by the tumblerful, and bickering with his mother, a tiny, worn-out woman with a nervous tic under her eyes. During the ceremony I held the traditional golden crown over him. In a fit of absent-mindedness—I was squinting at Nadya at that moment—I let my arm drop, and the heavy crown bumped Leo on the head. He jerked as from an electric shock.

There was a gala lunch at the Shan Ghyreys'; I sat next to Nadya. In the middle of the lunch a cat appeared in the doorway and started mewling plaintively. It was driven out.

"She's looking for her kitten," Nadya explained to me. "See this?"

She opened her hand under the table, and on her palm I saw a minute black kitten, still blind. It had been born that very night, Nadya said, in a hat-box under her bed. In the morning, upset by the general commotion in the house, its mother had started dragging it about in her mouth from one place to another, and as she might easily choke the little thing to death, Nadya had taken it from her.

"Why are you smiling?" she asked me, and I told her that somehow that incident with the kitten suited her, it was in her style. She did not understand what I meant, and I myself only understood it vaguely, but I wanted to say something nice to her because she was lovely. Although she had only drunk one glass of champagne, she said she was quite drunk; she laughed a lot, and laughter made her lovelier still.

Soon after that I had another fit of militarism and persuaded the commander of a howitzer battery to take me on for a short and intensive training: his battery was to go to the front in three months' time. But when I came to sign on, I was told that the commander had gone: they had sent him south at a moment's notice, and his successor would not have anything to do with me. Was it fate? I wondered. For I knew people who had tried hard to escape the army and failed; whilst I had done my best to get into it and had failed three times.

Willy-nilly I went back to my work at the War Council.

One day Lisa, my eldest sister, then nurse at a military hospital, told me about one of her patients, a peasant who had lost both his arms in the battle of Warsaw. Through her I gave him £150 or so, the bigger half of my savings. There is nothing noteworthy in that: other people gave away more than I did; but the curious thing is that both then and later on, for years, I felt ashamed of my action, and could not make out why. Only quite recently I discovered the reason, and that was when a poor man came to us begging, and my wife, not content with giving him food and some things, "wasted" half an hour on the porch listening to his stories about the road: he had come on foot from Yorkshire. That reminded

me of the French saying: *Qui ne donne pas soi-même ne donne rien*, which in turn made me think of that Russian soldier whom I had helped. Giving oneself—that was it, of course! I had not done it, I had not given anything of myself to him, I had never even seen him; it had been an entirely impersonal transaction, at best an act of “social decency,” which, however, cloaked itself as kindness: for it had all the appearance of kindness and would be taken as such by others. I had done “half the thing,” the same half which all the hard-eyed commercial bosses do when subscribing so many shillings or pounds to some charitable institution: “There, take it, and leave me alone.” Which is not wrong, of course, but . . . but I ought to have done “the whole thing.”

In the summer I spent a fortnight with the Tsertelevs and a week with the Shan Ghyreys on their estate in Central Russia. It had been a famous estate in old times, with 50,000 acres of land; it had been called Alexandra Palace then. Napoleon had stayed in it on his way to Moscow, and the sofa on which he had slept still existed: it was very long and very hard to sit on. The Palace itself was burnt down, 99 per cent of the land was sold, and the Shan Ghyreys now lived in a large old wooden house. Only a long avenue of gigantic, centuries-old lime-trees remained to speak of the old glory.

Besides the Zotovs, Nadya was there and Mme Shan Ghyrey, a diminutive woman of fifty, of unbounded kindness and energy. The two worked a lot in the house and on the estate, but one did not notice it: Leo raised so much fuss that life around him always seemed to be stationary. He improvised on a rheumatic piano, swore at the heat outside and the draughts inside, commented upon the war news, jeering at the Allies for their dilatoriness on the Western front, and talked, talked, talked on all subjects under the sun, moving his jaw from side to side—a new and highly irritating trick of his. As soon as he noticed that Irina was not with him he would grow excited and alarmed. “Where’s she? What’s she doing? I’m sure she’ll get a sunstroke!” he would mutter, rushing about and calling her. And he would only calm

down when she joined him; then he would beam, hold her hand, and resume talking. She teased him and called him My Idiotic Baby.

Nadya, I learned, was betrothed to an officer who was at the front; for some reason she seemed to avoid talking about him. She was gay and lively, but there was sadness beneath her gaiety, and once late at night I distinctly heard muffled sobs coming from her bedroom: it was next to mine, and our windows were open. Apparently she had spent the whole winter in bed: paralysis from a shock, she said, but would not tell me what sort of shock it was. With Nina, the third sister, something was wrong: she seemed distraught and ailing. In general, an atmosphere of drama hung over the family. "We are a cursed race," Irina said one day in her light, chuckling manner, and told me that a gypsy had cursed their grandfather, a man of truly Tartar passions who had ruined her sister.

Autumn came and people flocked back to the capital. I started calling at the Shan Ghyreys'. Mme Shan Ghyrey was always out, at church or doing charity work. Nina had gone to the Baltic provinces to join her husband, who seemed to be as bad a neurotic as Leo, and with Irina I had little in common, so Nadya and I usually had the drawing-room to ourselves. We would sit at a table in the corner under the lampstand. I smoked, she sewed shirts for the wounded or mended something—she was always working. "Don't you get tired?" I asked her, but she said No, she was used to it. In the Zotovs's room, on the other side of the wall, Leo was alternately whining, cooing and nagging at Irina; from time to time his voice rose to a querulous falsetto, and then one could hear the words: "It's terrible! You never do what I ask you! Monstrous! Oh . . ." The door would be flung open, and he would rush out, dishevelled, with a light of despair in his eyes. "It's madness, it's suicide!" he would pant. "She has a temperature, she looks flushed, and yet she won't take quinine!" He would rush back and attack his wife again; Nadya would smile—not without sadness.

I liked listening to her stories. They were simple and light on the surface, but always had a background of frustration. She would tell me, for instance, about a big sugar factory which they had owned once in the south, and then add in brackets: "It was burnt down, and it wasn't insured either." She would relate some funny episode about her brother—he was in the army—but when I asked her questions about him her answers were evasive and I thought I noticed a painful contraction of her eyebrows. Or she would mention Count Beauharnais, who had been Irina's fiancé, and then it would appear that the Count had ended by killing himself. Strange figures would pass the drawing-room on their way to Mme Shan Ghyrey's study: old women in black shawls, their faces furrowed with resignation and care ("about pensions or something," said Nadya); a young girl, obviously a nitwit, with an abnormally long face and a panicky smile ("she's a foundling, mother is trying to find a job for her"); slow, heavily bearded monks, smelling of oil, who made low solemn bows to Nadya and me, and crossed themselves before every ikon. For Mme Shan Ghyrey was a great churchgoer, and it was in a church that she made the acquaintance of Rasputin.

This had happened three years before, when Rasputin's star was standing high already. Too lofty-minded to suspect anybody of wickedness, Mme Shan Ghyrey had brought him to her house, and after that he used to call on them pretty often. He talked to her about churches and charity, and to the girls about his wanderings and the people he had met. He spoke Mujik Russian, but his speech was extraordinarily vivid: in one sentence he could draw a whole scene or a character. And he was a compelling personality: he made you listen to him whether you wanted to or not; "he cast a kind of spell on you."

One day Nina was showing him the family album. Rasputin casually turned the first pages until he came to the photograph of an officer. "Who's that one?" he asked, and on hearing that it was Nina's fiancé: "Forget all about him," he said with quiet assurance, "nothing will come of it, he's not for

you." Which proved correct: the same month she received a letter from him in which he broke off his engagement. (When uttering his prophecy Rasputin had added: "It isn't women he loves best," words which neither of the girls understood at the time, and which were corroborated several years later when they were all in exile.)

A young man was wooing Nadya at that time, Igor by name, a lecturer in philology and a remarkable linguist: he could speak and write in sixteen languages, and promised to learn as many again if Nadya married him. One day he and Rasputin met in the doorway: Igor was leaving and Rasputin coming in. Everybody except Nadya happened to be out that day.

"Who was that?" Rasputin asked her when they had settled on the sofa in the drawing-room. "Your sweetheart?" And without awaiting her answer: "A clever young man," he continued. "Too clever though. Don't you dream of marrying him, there are demons about him, he'll end badly."

Nadya flushed with anger: how did this mujik dare to slight her friend? Rasputin smiled good-naturedly.

"That's right," he said approvingly. "You won't let your friend down, not you! I like that. But you mustn't be angry with me. I just said what I saw; no harm done. So let's make peace and talk nicely."

He could be charming when he wanted to, and Nadya's grudge against him soon evaporated. "The sun is shining again," he said, putting his hand on hers. "You're a good girl, but you mustn't be so proud, because all pride comes from Satan. God loves the meek, those who don't think much of themselves." His hand passed to her forearm and stroked it. "Be meek, daughter, never resist what comes your way, not even if you dislike it. Who are you to like or dislike what the Lord in His inscrutable mercy sends to you? He may be sending it to test your obedience to His will." His hand was now caressing her shoulder; he bent forward to catch her glance. "I'm saying this for your good, daughter. I wish you well, and if you listen to me, everything will be well . . ."

He touched her neck. This had the effect of an electric



discharge on her. She brushed off his hand, jumped up. "How dare you!" she cried.

"Why! What's the matter?" he asked in surprise. "I wasn't doing you any harm, was I? Come, come, sit down, curb your temper, daughter."

"Dasha!" cried Nadya, who had heard the maid moving in the next room; and when Dasha appeared: "Dasha, the gentleman is going."

They never saw Rasputin again.

The demons which he had noticed around Igor must have been real, since two years later the young man ceased to call on the Shan Ghyreys, and when, worried by his long absence, they made enquiries about him, they found that he was in a nursing home. He had ruined himself with cocaine; his chances of recovery were nil, said the doctor.

The simple natural charm of the girl took possession of me. I thought of her, or rather I remembered her with tiring persistence: the lovely gentle profile, the soft line of her cheeks, the curl in the shape of a question-mark which hung over her temple and which she brushed back every minute. And it was always the sad girl I remembered, Nadya with a wistful, frightened look in her eyes. What did that look mean? Did it come from her engagement to that mysterious officer? Or from those concealed misfortunes which seemed to crowd the past of the family? These questions worried me more than I liked. It's no business of mine, I said to myself, but could not cast her image out of my mind, nor still my anxiety for her.

With time, from stray remarks of Irina's and from the way Nadya would stiffen when a letter without a stamp—from the front—was brought to her, I formed my conclusion as to the reason for her distress, and one day I asked her bluntly what was wrong. "I know that something is wrong, and I want to help you," I said.

"You can't help me," she said, bowing lower over her needlework. "There are things which are irreparable."

"Nonsense, nothing is irreparable."

**"Some things are. One makes mistakes from which there is no way out."**

Now I felt quite sure of my ground.

**"There's always the way back," I said. And as she shook her head: "Of course there is! Retreat is dishonourable, you'll say? That's only prejudice. In old times soldiers considered it dishonourable to retreat before an overwhelming force, so rather than do that they let themselves be massacred, to no purpose, to nobody's advantage. And that's what you propose to do with yourself: you're going to ruin the whole of your life rather than withdraw before it's too late . . ."**

I must have spoken well, for my whole heart was in that speech. She listened, and I knew that she liked what I was saying, she must have often had these thoughts herself. But there was tradition—600 years of nobility mixed up with morals and religion: whoever has given his word must keep it. Reasoning, I discovered, was helpless against that attitude of hers; I must combat it in some other way, by counteracting her depression. She could not see things as they were, because she was overworked and overdriven; if I could only raise her spirits she would herself realise the senselessness of her sacrifice.

To be of any use to her I had first to restore my own balance of mind, which the worry for her had upset; I had to put my own mind in order, as Yoga taught. Accordingly, I would go to St. Isaac's Cathedral when there was no service, and there, in an empty side-chapel, with my eyes shut, I would try by concentration of thought to penetrate past my turbulent emotions into those deeper layers of mind where the volitional arsenal of the self is stored up. "Be steadfast in devotion, but perform thine acts without attachment," is written in Bhagavad-Gita. And I would say to myself that I wanted nothing for myself, I only wanted to help her, and would not mind leaving her if that were necessary for her good. It did work: those hours of concentration did give me a sense of assurance and increased power, to which she responded by cheering up. The wistful look came less often to her eyes; she grew more animated, and laughed more readily.

"The summer has done you a lot of good," her mother said, naïvely as I thought.

One day at the Tsertelevs' the princess played *Tristan and Isolde*. Then we talked. My contribution to our talk must have been very poor, for she asked me: "Any trouble?"

I answered evasively: "I don't quite know what it is."

She smiled. "I think I know," she said.

I knew it too a few hours later, towards the end of a sleepless night. I felt both happy and frightened, frightened because I foresaw no end of struggle and pain ahead. "Keep out of it, don't ask for trouble," said the egoist in me, and the sombre oppressive house of the Shan Ghyreys would loom warningly in my imagination.

"Keep out of it, keep out of it . . ." I saw Nadya less often than before. Of my serenity nothing remained, I was in a state of turmoil, the silent séances in the chapel did not help any longer. A strain arose between us; our conversation became forced; more and more frequently I saw the wistful expression in her eyes. One evening the strain grew unbearable. "I've got a bad headache to-day," I said, and rose to go, but my other self forced me down before the chair on which she sat. I put my head on her lap, she stroked my hair. There was no need to speak.

Leo burst in waving an evening paper. "Ha, the Austrians got it this time!" he yelled, and bit his tongue. "I beg your pardon," he muttered and withdrew, for once shutting the door without a bang. Nadya's hands on my head began to tremble: she was laughing noiselessly.

The days that followed were far from happy. Nadya's sisters had never approved of Ivan, her fiancé; they knew he was quite the wrong man for her, but tradition kept them under its hypnosis, the thought that a Shan Ghyrey should back out of her word horrified them. Also they mistrusted me, they felt that I would not fit in with the family. They were certainly right there; I did not want to fit in with the family, from the very beginning I had made up my mind that Nadya must be got away from them and their dramas.

Nina was in a state of chronic depression and ailing; Irina was overworked at her office and suffered from endless headaches; and their two neurasthenic husbands were sucking the vitality out of them. Small wonder if, while loving Nadya, they tormented her as much as they tormented themselves, in the approved Dostoievsky manner. At first I tried to disregard them, then I rebelled against what I called their interference. Why could they not let Nadya work out her own salvation? I thought they were cruel to her, and I told them so, which made them miserable, them and Nadya as well.

But this friction did not arrest the normal development of events. Nadya wrote to Ivan breaking off her engagement. He wrote back sternly: "Our vows are indissoluble, they were made before God," from which I knew that he was a stupid man. He also said that he had applied for leave and would soon be in Petersburg (or rather Petrograd, as it was now called). The sisters were greatly alarmed and predicted a terrible row. Ivan, they said, was jealous, proud and savage. It was decided that in any case I must be kept out of it, so as not to make matters worse. Nadya wrote to him again, confirming her decision. There was a short silence, then a telegram arrived: "Coming in three days."

He came, called on Nadya, and they had an unpleasant and inconclusive explanation. He would not hear of letting her go. "Who is the traitor that wants to snatch you away from me?" he demanded. In vain she protested that there was no one, that she simply had ceased to love him. That he could not believe; that, he declared grandly, was impossible. He would find the traitor and kill him. "You'll soon hear from me," were his last words.

A state of siege was proclaimed in the house. The maid was instructed not to open the front door when the bell rang until Nina or Irina had peeped out of the window to see who the visitor was. Nadya and I carefully kept away from the windows lest our shadows betray us, and I was told to use the back entrance.

Then one evening there was a commotion. "He's come,

he's come!" shouted Irina. According to plan, we all rushed into the drawing-room and settled in a cosy circle, with Nadya as far from me as possible. Leo plumped down on a stool by the piano and launched into a wild improvisation.

Ivan came in and was immediately taken in hand by Irina and Nina, who overwhelmed him with questions about the war and the army. He answered reluctantly, twisting his moustache and casting suspicious glances at Nadya and me. I understood then why she had made her mistake: he was one of the handsomest men I have ever seen. I felt quiet: as is my wont, I had done all the worrying in advance; and besides, what could the fellow do in a drawing-room full of people?

Profiting by a lull in the conversation Ivan moved his chair close to Nadya and started talking to her in a subdued voice. Irina and Nina chatted on, watching him out of the corners of their eyes. Leo played Scriabin from memory, continually hitting wrong notes and cursing under his breath.

All of a sudden Nadya raised her head; anger shone in her eyes. "How noble of you!" she said aloud, with deliberate contempt.

Ivan jerked in his chair as though she had struck him. He stared at her, his eyes growing wild with fury, which made him handsomer still.

"What? You say that?" he stammered. "You forget what you've done yourself . . ."

Nina jumped up and rushed over to them.

"Now, don't you quarrel, you two!" she cried with charming geniality. "Come, let's have some tea, the samovar is on the table already. Come along, Ivan," and she put her hand on his sleeve.

"No, wait, I can't leave it like that," he muttered, shaking off her hand. "I must talk to her . . ."

"I'm not going to talk to you," said Nadya in a cold, measured voice. She had risen, too, and stood glancing away from him.

For a moment it looked as though he would rush at her. But both sisters were now between him and Nadya; he could

not do anything. He hesitated a little, biting his lips, then: "In that case I'm going," he declared angrily. "If she's afraid of talking to me . . ." He cast an annihilating glance at Nadya, nodded to the rest of the company, and made for the door. (As I learnt later on, he had told her that he had been spying on her, hence her contemptuous exclamation.)

"I think I'll go too," I said aloud to Leo: it had been arranged beforehand that in any case I should leave with Ivan so as to appease any suspicions he might have. We all went into the hall, chatting as naturally as we could manage.

Ivan put on his overcoat and smoothed down its creases. He was frowning darkly, avoided looking at anyone, and seemed not to hear what Nina was saying to him. I was talking animatedly to Irina, trying to convey the impression that I was flirting with her.

As he took his belt and started adjusting it, Leo stepped forward.

"Oh, a revolver," he said with curiosity. "What system is it? A Browning?" He did not see the desperate signals which Irina was sending him with her eyes.

"No, Webley Scott," said Ivan and clapped on the leather case of the revolver. It was as though this gesture restored his self-assurance. He raised his eyes to Nadya. "Yes, Webley Scott," he repeated with an odd emphasis. "It's a fine thing, kills at a hundred yards. Shall I show you?"

"Oh no, don't! I hate revolvers!" cried Nina in a tense voice, but he had drawn it already and was holding it barrel downwards without taking his burning glance off Nadya. She stood erect, leaning her back against the wall; the colour was rapidly receding from her cheeks; with her head thrown back she looked straight at him and there was a light of challenge and a strange elation in her eyes. She was beautiful then. I who stood a little behind Ivan held my breath. "Quiet, quiet, quiet!" I repeated to myself, fixing a spot on his temple which I must hit at his first movement—must, must, must . . .

And then, at the moment of greatest tension, when it seemed that the next second something unspeakably ugly

must happen, the door next to Ivan—the door of the spare room—opened, and with two swift steps Mme Shan Ghyrey joined Ivan. Her face was as serene as ever; nobody would have guessed that she had been standing all the time behind that door, knowing the danger that threatened Nadya, listening with anguish to every word and every sound in the hall.

“Are you really going, Ivan?” she said. “I’m sorry you’re leaving so early . . . But what’s this?”—she pointed at the revolver. “For heaven’s sake put it away! They always go off, one reads of accidents every day.” By now she had manœuvred herself into a position between him and Nadya. “That’s better,” she said with satisfaction as he stowed the revolver back into its case. “Well, I wish you could stay a little longer, but since you can’t, the best of luck to you.” She took his head with both hands and kissed him on the forehead.

He gave her a sulky look, muttered good-bye, and went out. I followed him. In the street he turned to the right and I to the left. “Good night,” I said cheerily, but he made no reply. I walked round a block of houses and through the back entrance into the flat again. It may have been imprudent of me, but I could not help myself.

Nadya was lying on the sofa in the dining-room; her legs had given way after the strain she had gone through. Her sisters were fussing about her. They started upbraiding me for the risk I was taking, but she silenced them.

“No, he’s gone for good, he won’t come back,” she said. “All this week a weight was pressing on me, and it isn’t there any more.”

Our engagement could now be announced. I took Nadya to the Tsertelevs’, went with her to the opera, and brought Tavrov to the Shan Ghyreys’. He was in excellent form, discoursed with terrific fervour on the delights of Chile, parodied Dostoievsky, recited Heine; they all fell in love with him. Toward the end of the visit, however, he suddenly lost his animation and shrank up within himself. As I

learned later on, he had buried his wife a few days before.

As time went I disliked the idea of Nadya staying with her family more and more. The house was unhealthy physically, cold and damp; and its very walls seemed saturated with dramas. Nina was ill, a nervous wreck (she had had an unsuccessful operation); Irina was bending under the cross she had taken on herself in marrying Leo. He was a terror at home. He had no notion of order, he lost things, smashed things, and made a mess of whatever he touched. He would fling himself on the bed with his dirty boots on ("My heart! it's wrong again!"), leave his fur coat in the drawing-room, his goloshes in the bedroom, his studs in the lavatory. At three in the morning he would feel queer, so he would whine and nag at Irina, then rush to the dining-room for some medicine, banging the doors and stumbling over the chairs. Dinner was late six days a week on his account. His money contributions to the family fund were most irregular; he had a decent salary, but it literally went through his fingers—he himself had no idea how. From time to time a bill would be presented to him for payment, a bill he had endorsed when in his cups for somebody he hardly knew. Since directly or indirectly it all affected Nadya I began to hate him.

I tried to make her detach herself inwardly from her family, and failed. Love and misfortune had united them more strongly than love would have done alone; they were like an organism in which one part feels, and must feel, everything that happens to any other. In vain I argued that she must create within herself an isolated corner where she could take refuge from the troubles of her sisters; I was asking for the impossible.

It was then I realised that love and kindness, no matter how deep and genuine, are not the all-sufficient and all-vindicating values that most people think they are. Rasputin had called the Shan Ghyreys "Good Christians," and they were certainly that—too good Christians. Many of their dramas—for by that time their history was known to me—might have been avoided, or at any rate softened, if the mother and the girls had not been so extravagantly kind and



loving, if they had shown some hardness here and some anger there. In the name of pity two sisters had ruined their lives, and nobody, not even their wretched husbands, had benefited by their sacrifice—it was just wasted. And now, in the name of affection, they were half-consciously pulling Nadya away from me, because they knew I would separate her from them, and they could not resign themselves to it. It was egotism within love. . . .

And this is why I cannot accept Christianity, that historical Christianity in which we are all brought up. It lays an excessive stress on emotion. By all means let us all be kind and loving—he is despicable indeed who has no *active* sympathy in him—but these qualities must be controlled by some non-emotional force, or else they are apt to degenerate into sentimentality and do a lot of unnecessary harm in life. Christ knew that; he was not “Christian”; he knew that there are occasions when one must be hard and even cruel; otherwise he would not have kicked the traders in the temple or cursed the “innocent fig-tree,” or thundered about Gehenna, the narrow path, and the chaff to be burnt. It is the Church which in the subsequent centuries sentimentalised and “improved” him by smoothing out his hardness, stressing his gentleness, making him meek and mild. In one of the apocryphal gospels there is a highly illuminating legend, suppressed by the censorship of the Holy Fathers. One day Christ the boy was playing on the bank of a river. He made little heaps of sand, clapped his hands, and the heaps turned into sparrows which flew away. Another boy came along and out of spite destroyed the heaps, whereupon Christ glanced at him and his arms became paralysed. It took the intercession of the Virgin Mary to make Christ restore vigour to the boy’s arms.

In the spring I decided to marry, and started looking for a flat. But I could not find anything, for while Nadya and I were busy with our private difficulties, the population of Petrograd had increased twofold, and no flats were available except at exorbitant prices. And just then she fell ill.

It was surprising she had not broken down before. She taught at a preparatory school where she did the work of two mistresses. The school was at the other end of the town; the tram system was disorganised, and twice a day she had to go through experiences like those of holiday-makers at Whitsuntide. She left home at eight, with two sandwiches in her pocket, was back at six, and immediately sat down to sew, unless she had gone to comfort some old female—half of her acquaintances consisted of wrecks and cripples. On Easter night, when going to church, she put on a light coat, the only smart one she had, and was punished for her vanity with bronchitis. She got up too early; disregarding the protests of her family and my appeals to her instinct of self-preservation, she resumed going to her school and her invalids, and soon had to go to bed again. This time it was more serious: her old spine trouble revived; her legs would not hold her; she could not sleep, and had excruciating headaches which lasted for days on end.

The idea took hold of her that she would never recover. "Drop me; why take on such a burden?" she said to me. I laughed, then stormed, and finally resorted to a rudimentary form of hypnosis. Whether it was the effect of reading Yoga, or that extraordinary influx of vitality that comes from love, in two sésances I cured her headaches. I tackled her insomnia, and at first could only make her sleep in my presence; but later on she regained her normal sleep.

In April she was up. But her recovery was superficial: fits of ominous coughing seized her now and again, she grew tired quickly, and her depression resisted all my efforts, hypnotic and persuasive. To take her mind away from her troubles I went with her to cinemas and theatres, read aloud to her, and taught her English. But I was spent myself; apathy was coming upon me; I began to despair of the outcome of our love and to think once more about the army. Had I the right to eat out my heart for a girl whom I could not help anyhow when my country was fighting for life? Love and Patriotism—which of these two duties should I obey?

I consulted a few people—why the devil should I make a

secret of my private life? My godfather replied like the gentleman he was: "It's your business, my dear, I can't interfere." The Princess held that it was no use my going on with a courtship so obviously hopeless: "If you marry her you'll only break your own life without doing her any good." Which was very sensible and just what I thought myself, but somehow I could not accept that reasoning; I felt it had a flaw somewhere.

In June Nadya left for her estate. I told her that I would try to get an appointment in the provinces, where it was easier to start anew than in the overcrowded, hysterical, disorganised capital. But I did not believe in our union any more, and my heart was heavy.

In the meantime big changes had come about in Russia. Prices soared every day; sinister queues stood all night long in front of the bakers' shops. Twice a week I left the War Office with a heavy bag—sugar, flour, rice, soap, which the War Office obtained for their staff. One could not use trams: to get in, one had literally to fight with an embittered, sullen crowd. In the streets, the restaurants and the Government offices, people of all classes and parties cursed Rasputin's intrigues and the treachery of the Court. Prince Yuri was crazy about killing Rasputin; he had access to an aristocratic house which the latter frequented, and asked me to lend him my Browning. I promised—with pleasure—but the Princess got wind of his scheme and talked him round. He then secretly joined a Cossack regiment and went to the front.

The word Revolution was in everybody's mouth: only let the war finish, and then. . . . I once saw my godfather, the high dignitary, a Conservative of the extreme Right, shake his fist in rage as he spoke of the Court. "They're mad, stark mad!" he shouted. "They'll ruin themselves and the country!" Tit came on leave from the front with a St. George's cross, and went back before his leave had expired. "No decent man can live in this Bedlam," he said.

The Tsaritsa and Rasputin played ninepins with the Cabinet. As soon as a Minister showed any independence of mind, he was knocked over and replaced by an obsequious

nonentity: by M., because he amused the sickly Tsarevitch by imitating the noises of domestic animals; by P., because he had a bloodhound's flair for Socialists. The Ministry of War was given first to B., because he had valiantly bayoneted a Turk in 1878; and then to S., whose oily manner and mujik mentality endeared him to Rasputin. At the meeting of the War Council, when S. rose to speak, Rodzyanko, the President of the Duma, would openly giggle and wink at his neighbours and myself, who sat opposite him, taking down the notes. "Er, er, gentlemen," S. would begin. "There's a lot, of course, in what you say, but we mustn't hurry, you know, we must think matters over properly, so as not to land the cart into the ditch, if I may say so, for where would we be then, eh?" . . . An atmosphere of dull dejection spread about the War Office. Leo fumed. He would begin a letter and fling it down on the floor, stretch out his legs, pant and click his jaws. As a restorative, he would read aloud from a humorous magazine or go to the Petition Section and hunt there for amusing material. There was one application which had a lithographed copy of an ikon attached to it, and began: "In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost"; in it, the applicant offered his invention for catching German aeroplanes by means of a lasso attached to the shell. Another advocated the construction of a narrow-gauge railway to the front specially for the use of the soldiers' wives: the writer, a practical Freudian, argued that the inefficiency of the army was due to the enforced sexual abstinence of the men.

My family having gone to Finland for the summer, I took a room at a rowing club on the Neva. I rowed in moderation, played tennis, and tried not to think of Nadya. I just marked time. It was at that club that I had my first contact with the English. There were half a dozen of them, all nice people, who seemed particularly sober-minded and restrained against the background of general hysteria. They would tell me about England. I remember how surprised I was to learn that in golf you do not kick the ball but hit it with a stick. "And what happens then?" I asked. "Well, you hole the putt eventually," said my informant. When he had explained to

me what Hole and Putt meant, "Is that all?" I asked. "Yes, what else did you expect?" he answered in surprise. He also told me that all the roads in England were asphalt. "In London, you mean?" I asked, but he said No, all over the country; this I found difficult to believe. I read Kipling in the original, leaving out the soldiers' slang, and thought *The Light that Failed* a great novel.

June passed, July began. Nadya was in Kabardinka, a village on the Black Sea, not far from Novorossisk. Her health was going from bad to worse. The doctor had prescribed absolute rest and at least a year's stay in the south; marriage, he said, was out of the question. She wrote to me freeing me from our engagement.

The game was up. I had a friend in the Black Sea navy, the captain of a destroyer which had just been launched and was to enter service in a couple of months. I knew he would take me, we had discussed it before; so now I wrote to him. He wrote back saying that everything was in order and I could come at once.

Another letter arrived by the same post, a short note from Nadya. She had been to a specialist, who had definitely told her that she had consumption. "God bless you, forgive me and forget me," ended the note.

I read it and re-read it, and then it was as though a huge window were flung open within me: I suddenly saw *my self*, and it was quite different from what I had always imagined it to be, for I saw that I, my real self, did not care a bit either for my future or the Black Sea destroyer, or the War, or even Russia, holy or unholy, but only for that girl whom I was allowing to pine away because I had lost faith in myself, in her, and in our love. And the same moment—not a second later, about that I am positive—I saw the way out, a very simple way, of which the Lord only knows why I had never thought before. I rushed to my godfather.

He was having his breakfast and offered me a cup of coffee. As I drank I talked to him. I felt very quiet: I knew for certain that he would do what I wanted him to do, because I wanted it with all that was in me. And he did it. The same afternoon

he saw the Minister of War, and a week later I was appointed to the staff of the Russian War Committee in London. I was also given ten days' holiday for the wedding, and went to Kabardinka.

Nadya was very weak but looked the picture of health (a special trick of hers). She could hardly walk, so I carried her about in my arms: either she was frightfully light, or I was very strong. When her family spoke of doctors and the London fogs, I said I knew more than the doctors did, because they had not read Yoga and I had. The rest—the scorching sun, the white hills, the blue sky, and the sea—has been described thousands of times and need not be repeated here.

We married in a village church where half of the service was in Russian and half in Greek, and went to Petrograd. There we took leave of our friends and relatives. Nadya cried, for she was sorry to part with them. I was not sorry for anything or anyone. Had I known then that I was not to see Russia again I would not have minded a bit, I would only have taken more luggage than I actually did.

Via Finland and across the beautiful ranges of Norway, we proceeded to England.

And now I shall come back to the conflict which I experienced during Nadya's illness, when I was torn between love and patriotic duty. As I have said, I freely consulted people on that subject, and either they said nothing or they gave me advice which I felt was wrong. I see now what would have been the right advice.

"First of all," they ought to have said, "forget all the big words you've ever heard about Duty. Absolute Duty, one that is valid for everybody, does not exist; as for your personal duty, you'll find it in the same place as the Kingdom of Heaven: in yourself.

"When you have forgotten the misleading big words, look into yourself and you'll discover that Duty is nothing but a moral cloak for your predominant aim—or wish. When the

wish to fight was uppermost in you, you talked of Patriotic Duty; when, tired of your youthful messes you wanted to rest in the coolness of abstraction, you invented Spiritual Duty; when you badly wanted a woman, you called that the Duty of Love.

"The conflict you are experiencing now is but a conflict of wishes. And the best thing to do in these cases is to ask yourself: What do I want most of all, more than anything else? Do not pay attention to what others think, do not speculate on what you ought to wish, just find which wish actually predominates in you. That will be your duty.

"In measuring your wishes you must consider not the present only, but the future as well: what do I want for to-day, to-morrow, the day after to-morrow? An effort of imagination is required. Well, make that effort, make it in a spirit of detachment, as though you were analysing someone else, not yourself, and the chances of your guessing wrong will be infinitesimal. Anyhow, this is the best you can do. You can only find Truth within you, not in other people, and not beyond the clouds."

## LONDON

I SHALL start this chapter with a summary of the notions which we in Russia had about England:

*Country.* England consists of London (fog of the Pea Soup variety, and rain), Scotland (ditto), and Ireland; also of towns like Bristol, Birmingham, Edinburgh, Manchester, etc.

*Population.* Lords, sea-wolves and detectives. Also women. The men have lean clean-shaven faces *à la* Sherlock Holmes, smoke pipes, carry tartan rugs with them, talk through their teeth, and speak no other language but English.

The women, all fair-haired, flat-breasted and with prominent teeth, are subdivided into Miladies (wives of Lords), Misses (unmarried), and Mistresses (married).

*Occupations.* Sheffield steel, shipping and football. Also tennis, golf, and cricket (the same as golf, only without holes).

*Character.* The women are supercilious and very cold (Tit, who knew women of all nationalities, was most emphatic on the latter point). The men have any amount of *sang-froid*, and are therefore good business men, quiet and reliable. They know what they want and they get it.

*Conclusion.* The English are a nation inspiring a good deal of respect and some envy—though not much, because, of course, they have not got the splendid Russian Width of Nature.

In my case that feeling of respect for the English was particularly strong, since war-time Petrograd and the Shan Ghyrey family had taught me to hate the blindly impulsive, haphazard way in which the Russians—not excluding myself—used to solve all their problems, individual as well as social. The English, I believed, possessed *par excellence* the qualities of will and self-control in which we were so lacking. They may be emotionally poor, but they know how to organise their life. The two nations are therefore complementary to each other, and would both gain a lot from a



spiritual *rapprochement*; therefore, when I get to England I must foster that *rapprochement*, and incidentally make a man, a real man of myself. . . . I vaguely dreamt of writing essays on England for the Petrograd magazines, arranging for the translation of good English novels into Russian, and, later on, acquainting the English with the emotional wealth of Russia.

I still think my idea was quite right: the two nations do complement each other. Those Russians who have lived in England with the English are all the better for it: they have improved enormously in tolerance, sober-mindedness, and inner balance. And conversely, the English who have lived in Russia for a long time, and not merely smelt her air from the train or the hotel, become unstiffened, de-conventionalised, and assimilate some of that directness about which an intelligent Englishman wrote:

“The Russians are a semi-barbarous people, and they seem to have retained the power of seeing things naturally, as though they existed in a vacuum; while we in the West, with our complicated culture behind us, see things with the associations they have gathered during long centuries.”\*

In October, 1916, we disembarked at Newcastle-on-Tyne. After the tidiness of Scandinavia we were shocked by the slovenly Newcastle quayside, with its decaying fences, badly patched-up sheds, rusty iron sheets, and ramshackle hovels climbing up the banks—everything grey, grimy and sooty. “Like the suburbs of Moscow,” said Nadya, to which I replied that it probably could not be helped in a highly industrialised country.

The journey to London made amends for this disappointing first impression. We saw that English efficiency of which we had read and dreamt in Russia, we saw it in the speed and the punctuality of the train, the solid build of the carriages, the absence of fuss and noise at the stations, the quiet calculated gestures of our fellow-travellers, the quick and easy way in which the conductor dealt with the tickets, and the porter with our luggage (no receipts!). The roads, we noticed, were

\* Somerset Maugham, *Altogether*.

all asphalt, even far away from the towns; wooden houses did not exist at all, everything was metal and stone. True, the lunch was so bad that we got up from it feeling hungry; and although we were travelling first class, our fellow-passengers dropped cigarette ash and other refuse straight on to the floor, as only the mujiks did in Russia; but we decided that a civilised nation could afford to be careless in one or two details.

We arrived in London, the arena of Sherlock Holmes's activity, the residence of Oscar Wilde's Lords, the financial navel of the world, the biggest city on earth. London was exactly what it should be: stony, uniformly grey, metallically noisy and, above all, huge. You felt its hugeness as soon as the taxi had taken you out of King's Cross Station, you felt that those rows of uniform grey houses between which you were driving, stretched on and on and never ended, could not end. The traffic was tremendous and amazingly well organised. When our driver found the road blocked, he did not try to crash through as his Russian brother would have done; he did not yell or wave his arms, not even when there was no policeman in sight, but put on the brakes and waited, silently, quietly, impassively. It was most impressive.

An hotel, an ordinary Bloomsbury hotel, although it called itself some kind of Imperial Grand Palace. Everybody frightfully civil in a non-obsequious, dignified way. "'Kyou,'" said the porter taking my case. "'Kyou,'" said the office girl handing me the key. "'Kyou,'" said the boy as I stepped into the lift. What did they thank me for? Was it a hint that I ought to tip them? "If you please, bring the big coffin to our room," I said to the porter, mixing it up with *Koffer*, the German for Trunk, and this time he did not "'kyou" me but only stared. The room we were shown into looked very inhospitable. "What does one sit upon here?" asked Nadya, there being no sofa and no armchairs in the room, only two very flimsy chairs. We put them against the wall, carefully sat down, and congratulated ourselves upon our safe arrival at the centre of Civilisation.

The queerest thing about our hotel was the food. We had

our first surprise at breakfast, which proved to be not breakfast at all but a sort of washing-day dinner, with sausages, bacon and fish. How people could eat these things at eight-thirty a.m. passed our understanding; we could not look at them, and ordered a cereal, expecting to get something like the French *croissants*. Instead of which we were served with brown, prickly-looking cylinders, not unlike dried hedgehogs. When I tried to cut mine with a spoon, it resisted and slid about the plate; when I resorted to my knife and fork, it exploded into fragments, some of which fell on the floor; and when I put a fragment into my mouth it scratched my throat and made me cough. "Perhaps you ought to suck them," suggested Nadya, but I did not feel like experimenting, and asked for some ordinary bread.

At the other meals food was less exotic. But it was bad, it was very bad. The soup, whether it called itself *Crème* or *Potage*, consisted mainly of pepper. The meat was dry and tasteless, the vegetables wet and tasteless, the puddings so tasty that we could not touch them. Nor could we drink tea, for it was not tea but some black Ceylon stuff, like coffee gone sour.

The inmates of the hotel must have been all high-class people, since they changed for dinner (which was only done in Russia on gala occasions) and walked about with that air of restrained gravity, cold yet benign, which, we knew from books, distinguishes the English aristocracy. Their manners were rather odd. True, they kept on saying "Thank you" all the time with great gusto, but they also kept their hands in their pockets when speaking to milady-like women; when greeting someone they did not bow or click their heels but nodded curtly and said "Hullo" casually; they lolled in their chairs with their knees on the level of their heads, and freely dropped cigarette ash on the floor, or, worse than that, extinguished their cigarettes in a saucer. The women, Nadya thought, had no idea how to dress: old women went arrayed *à la bébé*, and some of the colour-combinations were painful even to my indiscriminating eye; one young girl had an egg-shaped piece of leopard skin incrusting into the back of her costume.

Although it was October and quite hot, most women wore furs. Why? (Yes, why?)

But they were polite, there was no gainsaying that. They were frightfully keen on passing you the salt, the pepper, the matches, and in doing so they would make pleasant remarks about the weather—always about the weather. On learning that we were Russians they wished to know what people in Russia thought of the war, whether the winter was cold in Russia, and whether we always had tea with lemon (they still ask this last question, in Bloomsbury hotels and out of them). They listened eagerly, but it struck me that their attention was impersonal, it slid past myself, their interlocutor, towards the thing I was telling them about. As befitted the citizens of a business nation.

We devoted a couple of days to seeing London. The two prevailing impressions were those of hugeness and wealth. In Russia wealth was on the surface only, a thin veneer. The Court balls in the Winter Palace may have been the chic-est in the world, and *les boyards russes* would squander thousands on the same Parisian *poules* as economical Frenchmen got for hundreds; but the Russian state was poor, and *les boyards*, once back on their estates, drove about in rickety wagonettes, and could not afford to repair their decaying stables. A man with an income of £2,000 was considered a rich man by everybody and the word Millionaire had the same glamour as it has in England, although a million roubles is but £100,000. Now, in London wealth was solid, it went through the whole tissue of the town. Smart streets, of which there were only a score in Petrograd, were counted here by the hundred; from Mayfair and Belgravia you went miles and miles to Hampstead or St. John's Wood and again you saw rich houses, expensive shops, and unending streams of motor-cars. Is everybody rich in England, I wondered?

In the boarding-house to which we moved from our hotel we gathered some more information about English life. The English, it appeared, lived on a vertical plane: a maid did, by running up and down the stairs, a daily amount of climbing

which would have taken her half-way up Mont Blanc. Besides English, another language was spoken in London, called Cockney; the English themselves hardly understood it. Most of the cats were black, not white as in Russia; the climate may have had something to do with that. Some people took their breakfasts in bed, a notion as repulsive to us as shaving at a concert. The chocolate, packed very neatly and with pretty pictures on the lid, was uneatable, and Nadya used to give it away to the maid. If the bedrooms had no armchairs, this was because the English did not care for privacy; they felt quite happy spending the whole evening in the public rooms with perfect strangers, or, as we saw at Brighton, sitting seventeen rows deep on the beach, almost touching each other. "*Gospodi!*" we both said when we saw that. (*Gospodi* means "Good Heavens.")

But infinitely more important than chocolate, cats and bedrooms was the fact that life in London was normal. Everybody behaved quietly, exactly as though there had been no war. There was no trace of the embittered hysteria of Petrograd, no sign of economic strain; you could get anything at ordinary prices, which after Petrograd seemed fantastically low. One could *live* in London—one could not in Russia.

The Russian War Committee (India House, Kingsway) was heavily overstaffed, and we worked in a leisurely fashion, with plenty of time for gossip, newspapers, and discussions on the subject of the war. We behaved well, with more restraint than in Russia, for we were conscious of living in a civilised country, and also we were paid well. We wrote minutes to the War Office asking for struts and cocoa, boots and aluminium, silk and guns; these we shipped to Archangel and felt that we had done our bit. How were we to know that the Archangel Railway was breaking down and that expensive munitions were, for lack of sheds, dumped down anywhere and were sinking under their weight into the marshy ground? Our power of self-suggestion was still unimpaired, and because life in London was so calm, we believed that things at home were gradually getting better. "Oh yes, Russia is all right," said

the English, a formula which differs very little from, and is used on the same occasions as, the Russian *Nichevo*.

I made a point of cultivating the acquaintance of the English members of the staff. It was a pleasure to work with them: they did not fuss, they never lost their temper, and although their thoughts moved rather slowly, they were quicker than the Russians to arrive at a decision. There was Lt. King, a burly, good-natured young man with a round, jovial face (like Poup's at the Lytzey) and a telegraphic style of speech; he only used commas when he had had half a dozen whiskies in him. There was Lt. Pennington, R.F.C., so neat, modest and correct that I do not know how to describe him. And Mr. Brown, definitely a gentleman, with a continental polish in his manners; yet only the year before he had been in trade, and the wool trade at that—a combination inconceivable to a Russian. And Mrs. Fitzpatrick, very tall and equally thin all through, a lady and a typist at the same time (also an odd combination). I once made her cry with laughter by telling her that Lt. Pennington's minute was so long that he had had to finish it "on the behind" (meaning on the back). And I soon became friends with Johnson. He was just what an Englishman should be. He looked like Sherlock Holmes, smoked a pipe all the time, talked slowly and always to the point, was most obliging, and worked harder than anyone in the office; he was paid less than the others, heaven knows why, yet he never grumbled. He had a foible for Russia; like myself, he dreamt of serving the *rapprochement* of the two nations, and thought of going to Russia after the war. "Yes, we are a bit slow," he used to say in his unhurried, judicial manner. "It took us a year to realise that we were having a war and not an expedition. We ought to quicken up our minds." When I vented my apprehensions about Russia's military weakness he used to say: "Don't get flustered, Gubsky. Russia will pull through. She's all right." . . . He died two years later. R.I.P.

By far the greatest event of that winter was the death of an illiterate mujik, Grigori Efimich by name. He was poisoned;

but a quintuple dose of potassium cyanide failed to kill him. Yussupov shot him at a distance of eighteen inches and he fell down like a log; yet a little later he was running briskly across the yard towards the gate. Purishkevich, the same man whom Katya had "robbed," shot him again and killed him this time, Yussupov completing the job by smashing Rasputin's skull with a weight. The body was taken out to the Neva and pushed under the ice; yet at the autopsy his lungs were found to contain water: sure sign that he was alive when they drowned him. . . . But even that was not the end of Rasputin.

The story I am going to tell has, to my knowledge, not been published anywhere: I had it from Ivan Kurcheninov, then Chief of the Petrograd Police. At first, by the Tsaritsa's order, Rasputin's coffin was placed in a mausoleum near the Palace. When the Revolution broke out, some amateur politicians—Russia was full of them at the time—decided, for reasons best known to themselves, to remove the coffin; they took it out and enclosed it in a strong wooden case which was loaded on a railway truck. The workmen got wind of it, and, suspecting an anti-revolutionary plot, demanded the extradition of the coffin. But it had disappeared in the meantime: the truck had been shifted, no one knew where. There was a lightning strike and a demonstration of protest, with incendiary speeches and red flags; Ivan's officials searched all the railway sidings, a legend began to circulate to the effect that Rasputin was alive and driving about in a black car with a skull and cross-bones painted on it. Ivan had words with the Home Secretary, who tried to make him responsible for it all.

A month passed, Rasputin was forgotten, and then one day a station-master rang up Ivan to say that the case with the coffin had turned up, and what was he to do with it? Ivan did not know; fearing that the reappearance of the coffin might lead to more complications, he said: "Send it on somewhere." On the following day there was a call from another station-master, and: "Send it on," said Ivan. There were similar calls on the third, fourth and fifth day, till Ivan was tired of it and said: "Put it away somewhere." The case was then unloaded and placed in a warehouse. Now, there were

some students working in that warehouse, and they grew curious about the contents of the case. They opened it and found a coffin; they opened that, too, and recognised Rasputin. Whereupon they danced Gopak, carried the coffin to the crematorium, and burnt the body to the accompaniment of a mock service. . . . It was after that, of course, that Rasputin woke up to full activity.

When we officials learnt about the events in Yussupov's basement, we shouted hurrah and congratulated each other. Two months later, the news of the abdication of the Tsar made us hurrah even louder; we forgot that we were in a civilised country, we waved our arms, cried with joy and some of us even exchanged Easter kisses. Numerous speeches were made about Russia's imminent regeneration and the dazzling victories that were to follow; the speakers were thrown in the air and sometimes hurt in the process. "Traitors! You've ruined Russia!" yelled Captain Ankov, a neurotic and a die-hard, a second edition of Leo Zotov; but no one took him seriously.

When that emotional orgy was over, we went back to work, only to discover that its machinery was out of gear. There was chaos in Petrograd; Cabinets and Ministers changed at kaleidoscopic speed; the telegrams we received bore different signatures every week and contradicted each other. The army mutinied; the men killed their officers and went home. The mujiks waited a little and then, in the quiet and systematic mujik way, began to plunder the estates.

The staff of the Committee split into two hostile camps: the Monarchists and the Republicans; after a few collisions the members of the two factions ceased to speak to each other. "Don't worry," said Johnson, "Russia is on the right road, and that's the main thing; she'll soon settle down." All the English thought so, including those who later on maintained that they had foreseen and foretold the Russian collapse. For the power of self-suggestion is not confined to Eastern Europe—not by any means.

After the New Year we took a house at Harrow and started living a bourgeois life. Whilst I wrote minutes at the office,



Nadya learned how to manage a house in England. The most difficult problem was heating. In Russia it was not a problem at all: you put a bundle of logs into the stove, lit it, shut the door of the stove and forgot all about it; the wood burned and the room was warm for twenty-four hours. In England heating was an art, a tricky art. One day when Jennie, our maid, was out, I volunteered to light the fire in the drawing-room. I burnt six whole copies of *The Times* and spent an hour lying on the floor, blowing at the flames; the room was full of acrid smoke and I felt very hot, but not so the coals: they simply would not burn. "I think you have to lay some firewood first," said Nadya. "Let me do it, you go and wash your face." She actually got the fire lit in half an hour.

After the fire had been lit you had continually to do something to it: poke it, clean the grate, or add more coal. Even so, the result was unsatisfactory: while one side of you burned, the other froze. Draughts came in from all directions—horizontal, vertical, diagonal—since not one door and not one window shut properly. Sometimes the chimney vomited thick clouds of sour-smelling smoke, and then Jennie comforted us by saying that it was only the wind. And the moment the fire was out, an arctic cold would spread over the room. "It's a rotten house," said Nadya; but we soon discovered that all houses were the same: everybody froze from morning till night, and went about shivering and feeling miserable; they caught colds just as often as people used to do in Petrograd, and suffered from rheumatism more often. "What's the point of making life so unpleasant?" we wondered. We still wonder.

Nadya in the meantime had recovered from her lung trouble; her health left nothing to desire. But care was gnawing at her heart, care for her people whose life in Petrograd was becoming more and more difficult. She wrote to them every day, and on coming back from London I often saw that she had been crying. Two thousand miles were not enough to weaken her connection with her unfortunate family. I expostulated with her: what was the use of worrying when you could not help them anyhow? "And why do you

worry about Russia?" she retorted. "You can't help Russia either."

Her only friend in cold, unlit Harrow was Jennie, our maid, a pretty young girl, exceptionally cultured for her class, gay, witty and affectionate. Nadya was her confidante in the matter of boys; she was Nadya's teacher of English. She was a loyal soul. When the grocer, rightfully indignant at Russia's military slackness, made to her some disrespectful remark about "your Rooshian female," Jennie hauled him over the coals, or, to use her words, raised a tantara: she called him a snouty 'ypocrite and a cock-eyed shrimp, and wound up with the curse of the Seven Protestant Gods (she was an ardent R.C.). When, many years later, she and Nadya met again, they fell into each other's arms and cried. . . . Jennie is married now, and lives in a house which makes Nadya sigh with envy.

Winter passed, summer came. The news from Russia was bad. The grim business of human slaughter, which so far had been confined to the perimeter of the country, now spread over the whole of its area. Chaos reigned supreme. Dictatorships sprang up like mushrooms and withered as quickly. One did not know what to expect next. The word *Bolsheviki* figured more and more often in the papers. "Yes, I'm afraid things look rather black," admitted Johnson.

September—October—November. On the very day when a handful of Bolsheviks led by a Tartar-looking man with an unclean collar became the masters of the Russian Empire, a nurse with two cases settled in the spare room of our house. But it was not illness this time. I moved downstairs, had dinner by myself, read a little, and went out. I ran up and down Harrow Hill, then up again and down again. Not that I feared for Nadya, I knew that everything would be all right, but I had to do something violent (the famous Russian temperament!). Then I went home, sent Jennie off to bed, and tried to read, but could not. I tried to talk to Nadya through the closed door, but when she started groaning I rushed out once more to the long slope of Harrow Hill. I repeated this several times that night; and the next morning; and in the

afternoon; and in the evening. I hated the child that was to come with an acute hatred; I would start cursing God for His cruelty, and then remember that there was no God; I pestered the nurse until she lost patience and told me to go to hell. At dawn I fell asleep, and at midday Xenia was born. She looked as all babies do, that is to say repulsive. She was certainly not worth it, I thought. My legs could hardly bend, and I suddenly remembered that instead of indulging in mountaineering exercises I ought to have practised Yoga. But one always forgets these things just at the most important moments!

Work on the Committee stopped: it was no use sending munitions to an army which had turned against its own officers. The political feud among the staff stopped too: Lenin had performed the miracle of reconciling the Monarchists with the Republicans. The officials read papers, started talking, and broke off with weary gestures: talking was no use. Sometimes a Memorandum would arrive from the Finance Department requiring urgent information about the shipment of the case 11451—c; nobody paid any attention. Johnson shook his head. How was it, he wondered, that the Bolsheviks were encountering no resistance? He did not say so, but he certainly attributed to the flabbiness of the Slav character what in fact was due to the numerical weakness of the Russian educated classes.

We moved to London. The seclusion of Harrow had begun to weigh on us. Hard times were coming, and, as all animals do in trouble, we felt drawn towards our kin.

One of the last to cross the Russian frontier before it was closed by the Bolsheviks was Ivan Kurcheninov, estate owner and Marshal of Nobility, whom I had slightly known in Petrograd. He brought with him his wife, an aged French governess, five children, an odd assortment of cases and bundles, and a few hundred pounds sterling in credit notes which were sewn into his pants. He had also smuggled some jewels but had left the case in a Swedish lavatory. He

obtained a nominal job on the Committee with a modest salary.

He was tall, Mongol-looking and full of energy. "We must face the facts," he said to me. "The English have no use for us; the Committee will be closed sooner or later, and what shall we do then?" His answer was: farming. He calculated that if he and I were to put our savings together, we might rent a medium-sized farm and live on it long enough to turn it into a paying proposition. Unfortunately he suffered from a hypertrophy of social consciousness: what saved him must needs save the others as well, and so he began to invite more people to share in our prospective farm: Colonel Nejin, who came of very good family but was an all-round fool; Rayev, a civil servant, certainly not a fool, but a lickspittle and an intriguer; Leykin, Ph.D., who knew Bergson by heart and could talk of creative evolution till one was sick of it; and a few others. When it turned out that one farm was not big enough to hold all the candidates, Ivan hit upon the idea of farm settlement: half a dozen farms situated in a group, with a co-operative shop of their own and a steam tractor hired on joint account. The whole thing was becoming fantastic, but Nadya and I refrained from voicing our scepticism, for we counted on the co-operators quarrelling with each other. That was exactly what they did, and some of them dropped out. But just then Ivan changed his plans.

"What about America? We've never thought of America!" he cried one day. By that time he was thoroughly fed up with the English climate and the English ways of living. If in London, at any given moment, three members of his family were in bed with colds of all descriptions, what, he wondered, would it be like in a wind-swept farmhouse? And in America they had central heating, a decent climate, and practically the same agricultural conditions as in Russia. He began to make enquiries about America. Someone suggested Rhodesia, where they grew tobacco. "Yes, we must consider that too," said Ivan, and asked Rayev to get some prospectuses of Rhodesia. And Queensland. And Brazil. And Canada. His office was turned into an emigration bureau. From ten to five

people thronged it, asking questions about three continents, smoking, reading the papers and arguing with each other, all at the same time.

"America for me!" shouted a nervous captain with a tic in his eye. "Either America or nothing!"

"What about New Zealand?" someone enquired: an Australian to whom he had stood a drink had told him that N. Z. was God's own country.

"We haven't finished with Canada yet!" another shouted.

"Canada be damned! Haven't you frozen enough in London?"

"I'm not talking to you, I'm talking to Mr. Kurcheninov . . ."

"Yes, but it's idiotic to talk about Canada when you know . . ."

"Please, gentlemen, please, not so loud!" Ivan begged, coughing and sneezing. "One thing at a time. With regard to Canada we have established that the average temperature in Wisconsin was . . . Mr. Rayev, what was it exactly? And do shut that door, for heaven's sake, the draught is simply terrible."

In the middle of these deliberations came the news of the dissolution of the Committee. I had expected it, and thought I was prepared for the shock, but I must have been deceiving myself with the hope of some miracle, for now I felt as though the ground had been knocked from beneath my feet. It was Nadya I was worried about. For two years it had been my *idée fixe* to make life easy for her, so as to compensate her for what she had endured before; and now it was the end of our easy life. Ivan's woolly schemes obviously could not come to anything, and I did not believe in the chances of the White Generals. The £400 which I had might last a year or so—and then? Unemployment? poverty? overwork for Nadya? "We'll pull through," she said, but I knew that she too was frightened.

The Committee closed down in the summer of 1918. Ivan was out of work. My fears proved premature, for I was kept on by the British Commission appointed to liquidate the

business of the Committee. We moved to the Kurcheninovs' house, partly to reduce the expenses and partly for the sake of company: solitude proved to be a bad cure for gloomy thoughts. Jennie went with us. She did not mind being the only maid for two families so long as she stayed with Nadya.

With the Kurcheninovs we lived for six months in perfect harmony—by no means a difficult achievement, since they were unusually nice people. Mme Kurcheninov, in particular, was one of the best and rarest. She knew that with five children, hardly any money, and Ivan's complete lack of adaptability, their chance of keeping afloat was almost nil, but that did not trouble her. "Happiness is outside money"—to her that was not a phrase but a reality as obvious as the day. She needed no money to love her children—hers and any other she came across; to have good friends; to chat with Nadya and laugh at Jennie's humorous sallies. If she could not afford beautiful things—since music means money, and books mean leisure—she contented herself with their reflection in her mind. In the midst of her drudgery, when sweeping a room or doing little Shura's hair, she would suddenly stop and, with the light of a visionary in her eyes, listen to the immaterial sounds of Schubert's Symphony or remember Chaliapin's recitation of Pushkin's Boris Godunov at her Moscow house, or lose herself in some resplendent abstractions—life and immortality, joy and suffering—abstractions saturated with the light of beauty and the force of revelation. "The point about pain," she said to me once, "is to keep one's mind on the future, where the justification of pain is ripening, and take no notice of the present, where pain is still unredeemed." Words as intelligent as they are unusual.

Eighteen years have passed since; Ivan died long ago; all alone she has brought up her five children on hard shillings and pence earned by unceasing work, saved with ruthless self-denial. She is chronically tired now, yet you won't find a trace of bitterness or disillusionment in her; she has preserved intact that ability for immediate spontaneous sympathy which

she has in common with Tavrov (and my wife); her eyes, when she talks of things near to her heart, are radiantly young; she can still laugh with the abandon of a girl, and will rush into a heated argument if you dare to find fault with a novel by Turgenyev, the ideology of Christianity or the Pathetic Symphony. A great woman, whose friendship makes me feel proud—till I remember that the credit for it is wholly hers. We are miles apart by now, for I have moved off her plane, the plane of kindness and compassion, having exchanged them for other harder values which she cannot accept. But that does not affect our relationship.

On clear nights there were air raids. At the first blast of the sirens Jennie would hop out of her bed and rush into our room. There she would sit by the gas fire with her back to our bed, eat an orange and whisper: "Oh dear, oh dear," at every explosion, whilst I would say to Nadya, in Russian: "I hope some German idiot will hit us." But that never happened.

One night Nadya and I were caught by a raid as we were coming out of a tube station. The Germans were—or seemed to be—right above us; pieces of shrapnel were falling on the asphalt all around with dry short clicks. In no time the street grew empty. I danced exultantly on the pavement, Nadya chuckled. A policeman ran past us hugging the wall and shouting angrily: "What's the idea? why don't you take cover?" He seemed very funny to us and we laughed. It was not courage, but nervous reaction: after a year of monotonous passive worry, swift tangible danger was a relaxation.

The sea of imagination has no dimensions, and from a house in Hampstead, Rhodesia is as easy to reach as Abyssinia. The idea of Abyssinia came to Ivan from a Russian refugee, a queer horse-faced poet of the Agiotist school (whatever that meant), who had been there before the war with an ethnographical expedition and had returned from his trip with a volume of sham exotic poetry and an unshakable self-assurance. Abyssinia, he declared, was just the right place for

the Russians: warm climate—plenty of sunshine—vast spaces—splendid shooting—and, on top of it all, the same Church: Greek Orthodox. In the evenings some of the ex-officials of the ex-Committee would gather at the Kurcheninovs', and the poet, assuming a far-away look, would chant in an unnatural voice his ballads about the Invulnerable Rhinoceros and the slender Ethiopian beauties, the Whizzing Spear of the hunter and the Blue Eyes of the Jungle (apparently a mountain lake). The others listened, fascinated, and an orgy of imaginary adventuring would break out. They put up their tents in the jungle, hired a hundred Ethiopians, and grew plantations of valuable tropical fruit; some said it was sugarcane, others, mangoes. Or they struck for the mountains (on mules and heavily armed, of course) and started trading. It was a profitable business: for two pounds of salt, said the poet, you got a whole elephant tusk; for two boxes of matches, a leopard skin; so that if they only brought with them a hundred-weight of salt and a gross of boxes. . . . In the kitchen Nadya and Mme Kurcheninov attacked an enormous heap of dirty plates and shook with laughter visualising our six children crossing a mountain torrent, or Commander Perovski parading about in Ethiopian gala attire: *ceinture de pudeur* and umbrella. After one or two meetings I ceased to see the fun of it, and only saw the pathos. . . . As a matter of fact two of them did go to Abyssinia in the end: one died of fever, the other was appointed infantry instructor to the Negus's army, and must now—if alive—be longing to emigrate to . . . London.

In the summer we heard that on account of the air raids Margate was deserted, so we went there for our holiday. It was a clever notion: the rooms were exceedingly cheap, and we saw Margate at its best: standing on the wide esplanade one could actually count the people in sight.

The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk was concluded, that utterly untraditional act which was to contribute more to the defeat of Germany than the millions of untrained Russian soldiers



would have done had they stayed in the trenches. But we did not foresee the paradoxical portent of events, and reality was hidden from us by the fog of patriotic romanticism. Russia, we thought, had covered herself with an indelible disgrace, and we all felt besmirched. Several young officers sailed to Vladivostok to join the White Armies; they went as much because they could not look the English in the eyes as because they wanted to fight the Bolsheviks.

Armistice Day. A snowstorm pouring out of the waste-paper baskets into the City lanes; Tommies and shop-girls rushing about in lorries dangling their legs, singing "Tipperary"; the sense of an enormous effort vindicated; visions of returning prosperity. . . . I tried not to look at the jubilant crowd, I who alone amongst them had no national home, no country, no reason for jubilation: a Wandering Jew. Nadya met me in the hall, and in her eyes I read the same feeling which I was experiencing. "Hullo," I muttered, passed to the drawing-room and took up Seton Merriman's atrocious novel: *The Sowers*. I read, wickedly enjoying the stupidities of it, and suddenly it struck me that all that was happening in Russia, her defeat and her treachery and the Civil War, might be the only means of bringing her out of her perennial inertia on to the road of evolution. That thought just flitted through my head and was gone: I was not mature enough to part with my habitual patriotic conceptions.

We had a quiet time at the British Liquidation Office. We wrote to the War Office asking for a copy of Issue Voucher NFG 346578 and waited. After a while we wrote a reminder and waited again. When the voucher arrived we made an entry in our books and calculated what Russia owed Great Britain for BE2E Aileron Struts Pins Spare, case of. At the rate we did this, our jobs, we reckoned, would last till the year 1980. But unfortunately somebody in high quarters made the same computation, and we were dismissed *en bloc*. I was quite free now, free in all possible senses: with no job, no country, no property. "Don't worry," said Nadya. "So long as we love each other, we can't go

down." While she was saying it I knew she was right, but I kept on worrying all the same.\*

The Kurcheninovs had given up their house and were now living in three dark squashy rooms: they thought it was cheaper, but as a matter of fact it was not. My mother had died just before the Bolshevik *coup*—I was glad for her sake—and I had no news from my sisters. Nadya's family had fled south, where they led a gypsy life. Russia did not exist: what had been a nation had turned into a savage mob.

I avoided the Kurcheninovs and the other Russians, for they were all overpowered by the same dejection. I avoided my English friends too: their satisfaction at victory and their quiet assurance about the future only emphasised my feelings of national humiliation and personal helplessness. I was back to the state of inner bankruptcy in which I had been three years before when I thought that I had lost Nadya—with the difference that now there was no army I could join as a *pis aller*.

Somewhat earlier, as a measure of self-defence against demoralisation, I had started writing a novel. For its subject I had taken that turbulent period of my life when I was in love with two girls and knew Tavrov. The plan presented no difficulties, it was there, drawn for me by life; and to wind up the story in the proper dramatic manner I had decided to kill Tavrov at the end. It was a most painful decision; for a long time I could not lift my arm against him, I felt almost as though I were committing a real murder.

\* That free uncontrolled play in which the mind indulges between periods of concentration, as when we walk along a street or sit in the lavatory or drink coffee, is as individual as the human face. Some people in these moments of relaxation think mainly of what they have done and are about to do; others visualise pictures and scenes; others still ruminate on what they have heard or read. My thoughts usually turn round people. I do not visualise them; they appear to me as transparent shadows which, if they could be photographed, no one but myself would be able to identify. I *feel* rather than visualise them, and I commune with them in thought and feeling, without words. My speciality is to pick up their worries: I am great at appropriating them and making them my own, so that I end by feeling as miserable as though these worries were really mine. Nadya has that capacity too, but whereas in her the reflected worries turn entirely into sympathy, in me only half of them becomes sympathy, the other half turns into a grudge: "Why the dickens can't they leave me alone?" My novels, I think, are a sublimation of this emotional imagination.

I wrote furiously, spending all my free time at the manuscript. My mind was on fire; I felt I was producing a remarkable work, because I was writing it straight from the heart and straight from life. But when the first rough draft was ready and I re-read it, my spirits sank. Katya was the only person in it who had more or less come off (why just Katya?); Lydia was but a shadow, I myself an intolerable prig, and Tavrov a pompous windbag. The speeches were stilted, the scenes disconnected, the whole had no shape.

I tackled the novel once more. I decided—which was quite a wrong supposition, of course—that it must come off if in the process of writing I made myself re-live all the pain I had experienced then, and put it all down, without fudging. That was what I did. The expenditure of emotional energy was tremendous, over certain scenes I worked myself up to the point of hysteria; yet Version Two was a failure again. It had a bit more shape than Number One, but the emotion was overdone, the characters all became neurotic. A novel, I began to guess, needed more than sincerity and determination. Should I ever succeed in writing it properly? I was not sure. And even if I did, I should not get a penny for it, since the Russians—I was writing in Russian—were too busy killing each other to be interested in my sentiments. Still, as I had to keep my mind busy one way or the other, I started upon Version Three.

People, including Nadya, approved of my absorption: anything, they thought, was good so long as it kept me from brooding. I doubted it. Was the opium of oblivion really the only means—and the right means—of overcoming one's trouble, meaning by trouble not the external circumstances (for man has no control over them), but their reflection in his mind, his inclination to dwell futilely on them, the toxins of dejection and weariness which they produced? I felt sure there was another direct way of tackling one's own mind, but what that way was I had no idea. Tavrov would not have helped me there, for his method of coping with trouble had been essentially the same as I was adopting now: he ran away from it, he doped himself with excessive work and Personal

**Relationships.** Nadya and Mme Kurcheninov were different, they were not afraid of facing their troubles and knew how to overcome them. Religion helped them, religion and unusual capacity for sympathy with which nature had endowed them. In me, sympathy was stiff and fastidious, and God was an empty sound to me, so it was no use my trying to imitate them, I had to find my own method. Vaguely I felt that it must be an intellectual method, something to do with "understanding," some attitude of mind which would give me inner steadiness without my having to prop myself up on an Absolute or any other premise. Yoga ought to have answered that purpose, but somehow it failed me now. I remembered its theses, but they had lost their vitalising significance, just as one may remember a melody and yet be unable to hear the mystic message which it used to convey before.

And this is the fundamental trouble of our civilisation. Religion has gone or is going; deprived of its religious basis, morality is crumbling to pieces; and civilisation, our Money Civilisation, has no values and no wisdom of any kind whatsoever to offer instead. In a big city you can at a moment's notice obtain any amount of information on Bolivian ticks and Artaxerxes' love affairs, and what some dunderhead of a don thinks about a muddle-headed mediæval scholiast. But if you are in serious trouble and must find a way of meeting it without resorting to an Absolute, there is nothing and nobody to help you: no teachers, no books. "We haven't the foggiest," people will say if you ask them. . . . Un-premised thinking, or as I call it, Realistic thinking, is still in its infancy.

On the 6th of December—I remember the day because it is my nameday—Nadya and I went to see a friend of ours in Chiswick.

"Would it amuse you to have your fortune told?" she asked. "A lady who lives next door is marvellous at it. She told me"—and there followed a long list of wonderful predictions which had all come true, every one of them.

We said Yes, and she sent her maid with a note to Mrs. Somerset. The lady, she told us, was foreign by birth,

spoke English with a bad accent, was married to a solicitor, and had never heard of our existence.

Five minutes later Mrs. Somerset shuffled in. She was fifty-five, carelessly dressed and queer-looking. Absent-mindedly, without so much as glancing at us, she shook hands, sat down at a table, produced a pack of cards and without any preliminaries proceeded to lay them. "Who's first?" she asked, and I came forward.

"So you're first?" She glanced up for a second, just long enough to recognise that I was a man and not a woman. "Well, we shall see. . . . Bad cards, all black. . . . No money, no work, nothing. . . . You worry a lot, more than most people do. But you needn't, because it's all passing. In a fortnight you'll get an appointment under the Crown to deal with men of two nations. Yes, in a fortnight."

"That's impossible," I interjected with a smile of superiority. For I knew what she did not know: that the British Government would never employ a Russian, and that the last Russian Government institutions were closing down.

"What you say? Impossible?" She sniffed angrily. "Why impossible? That's what the cards say, so it isn't impossible. There, you can see for yourself: the Crown and two nations. That'll be in a fortnight. And soon after that you'll go over the water for a long journey, but that's only pleasure, so it doesn't matter. Well, that's all." She had done with me, and swept her cards together. "Will the lady have her fortune told also?"

To Nadya she repeated what she had said about my appointment. "Your people," she added, "are far away in a hot country. They're having a bad time, and that will go on for years. But they won't die for a long time." Her job completed, she collected her cards and went hurriedly off, her eyes fixed on the ground. Not a charlatan, I thought, but dippy. "I'm sure what she said is true," cried Nadya, and I proceeded to damp her optimism. It is my nature to prepare myself deliberately for the worst; I call that attitude Self Insurance, and consider it safer and cheaper than optimism with ensuing disappointments.

On the 17th of December I called at the Russian Embassy to enquire about an Old Lytzeyan who was due from Paris. He had not arrived yet.

"And how are you?" asked my informant, a man whom I knew but slightly.

"Rotten," I said.

"No job?"

"No."

"Hm, nasty. . . . By the way, that reminds me: Radlov, our Vice-Consul at Newcastle sent in his resignation this morning. He's going to France. Would you like to try and get his job?"

"How can I? I'm not on the Corps Consulaire."

"That doesn't matter. We haven't got anyone who is, so in any case we'll have to take an outsider."

"Mrs. Somerset!" I thought, and calculated: this was the eleventh day since her séance. I was taken up to see the Chargé d'Affaires, and a few minutes later my appointment was fixed. I was to work under the Crown and deal with men of two nations.

Nadya was not surprised. "I knew it would come true," she said. "Somehow I trusted that woman."

Seven years earlier in Petrograd I had interrogated a clairvoyante, the same who foretold my meeting with Lydia, about the way she did it. She was a sensible, sober-minded woman, and honest in her way. This is what she told me.

"My ordinary fee is seventy-five kopeks, but for that, of course, I can't do the real thing. I just lay the cards somehow and let my customer talk; and when I know what's worrying her—for it's usually women who come to me—I say something comforting, for instance that the silver which has been stolen will be found, or, if somebody is ill, that he'll get better. It helps them even if it doesn't come true; they sometimes write to me thanking me for cheering them up, so I feel I'm not cheating them. Now if it's the real thing, I charge more, as I've charged you, for instance, because it takes a lot out of me: I usually have to break off after that. . . . How I do it?

First of all I lay the cards in a special way, not the one I use for seventy-five kopeks. Not that the cards tell me anything, but they help me to tune myself up, if you know what I mean. When I'm ready I shut my eyes; then pictures begin to float before me, as in a cinema or a dream, and as I see them I tell the customer what I see, even if I don't understand the meaning of it. Sometimes the pictures are clear, sometimes not, I don't know why; but if they are not, I can't make them any clearer. . . . No, no effort, that would spoil the whole thing. And no strain either. But when it's over I feel tired and want to lie down and sleep. . . . The future? Well, it's no different from the past really; they're sometimes mixed up in the same set of pictures, except that sometimes I feel that this thing and that one may still be avoided, which means that they must be in the future. But I don't always get that feeling. It has happened to me that a customer said: No, it wasn't like that, and yet I was telling her what I saw. But later on I would get a letter saying that the thing had actually happened since the séance. . . . That's all I know. I don't understand much about it myself. It just happens, I don't know how. I only think—but that's rather difficult to explain—that there is really no difference between the past and the future; they're both there, but we can only see one of them as a rule. . . . No, I don't like my profession" (this with emphasis)—"I feel it's wrong somehow, people shouldn't know what's in store for them. But one must live, and I have a daughter at a secondary school, she's top of her form . . ."

I may as well relate a story I heard from Andreyev, a lieutenant in the Russian Navy, a realist whom no one could accuse of occult leanings, a raconteur, a Don Juan, and a heavy drinker. When in his cups he would become aggressive, start a row, fight and get fined. He was a very truthful man; I have never known him exaggerate, let alone tell lies.

"One Christmas night," he told me, "my mother took me to call on some people. I'd got the blues: my furniture had just been sealed up by the bailiff, I'd been summoned by a fellow I'd knocked down, so I didn't want to talk to anyone, and when they introduced me to a female I simply couldn't think

what to say to her. We walked round the Christmas tree, gaped at it, and said: Isn't it pretty? One couldn't go on repeating that all the time, so in the end I asked her whether she would like me to tell her fortune. Of course, I had not the faintest idea how it was done; but she said Yes, please, and gave me her hand. I took it, looked at her palm—just an ordinary palm it was—and began to talk. And then I realised that I was saying something queer: that she didn't love her husband, that she was thinking of eloping with another fellow abroad and waiting there for her divorce; that she was worried about her child, but she would get it all right in the end. Heaven only knows where I got it all from; anyhow all of a sudden she pulled away her hand, burst into tears and rushed out of the room. Everybody looked at me, and I felt a fool, because I couldn't explain; so I left too. And later on I heard that she had indeed eloped with a chap and got her divorce and her child. . . . I never tried it again; once is enough, thank you."

I know other authentic cases of reading the future, cases which cannot possibly be explained away by coincidence or self-suggestion. I cannot therefore say as many do: It's all nonsense. Charlatans there are, of course, but they invalidate the real thing as little as the faked pound notes invalidate the genuine ones.

Since the phenomenon is there one wants to understand it. Some mathematically-minded philosophers draw a pink cube, surround it with six green ones, and then, by means of highly sophisticated argument, arrive at the conclusion that the actuality of the future is in the fifth dimension, and its potentiality in the sixth. I for one cannot follow them. The problem, I think, is beyond the limits of our normal consciousness; all we can do is to postulate that in some way the future coexists with the past, the present being the point through which our consciousness is passing. Imagine the Sahara and a traveller moving across it. At any given moment he only sees a tiny part of the desert, and for him that part is separated from the rest by time: so many hours of walking to the next oasis, so many to the border; whereas an aviator who has risen high



enough can see the whole of the Sahara at the same moment. In other words, it may be assumed (*a*) that apart from us time is motionless and only appears to flow because our minds move through it; and (*b*) that there are certain abnormal states of consciousness which correspond to the rising of the aeroplane above the ground and reveal the simultaneity and the static quality of time. To go beyond these tentative similes is risky: one is apt to lose oneself in arbitrary speculation.

It is just as well that we do not know our future. If we did many of us would not have the heart to go on struggling. For a great deal of man's courage is due to his hope that the hardship he is going through will not last for years and years but will end soon, perhaps in a month, perhaps to-morrow. The trenches in Flanders and elsewhere would have been empty before the winter of 1914 had the men known on indisputable authority that the war would go on for four years.

## NEWCASTLE

**I**N Newcastle you feel at once that you are in the north; you feel it as soon as you have left the train and stepped out of the black grimy station. No matter what the thermometer says, the air has a bitter edge to it which it has not got in the south. "Bracing" is the adjective used by the natives in connection with their climate, and perhaps it does brace them. But it had quite a different effect on the Russian sailors from Captain Mukalov's ice-breakers. They were all men from Archangel and Murmansk, used to temperatures of twenty, thirty and forty below zero, yet in Newcastle they went about shivering and complaining of the cold. "This is far worse than the frost at home," they said.

The city: black dismal streets; shops which try to look smart but cannot conceal their provincial shabbiness; heavy, clattering trams whose speed is in inverse proportion to the noise they make; grey groups of unemployed lined up against the walls and waiting with northern stolidity for something that will never happen. . . . The suburbs: long, straight, windswept streets; rows and rows of identical grey houses; somehow one cannot imagine their inhabitants otherwise than sitting by the fire and mutely staring into space. . . . The Town Moor: a huge bare meadow with ugly bald patches in it; a low leaden sky hanging over the tops of the trees; the wind blowing from all directions at once, driving discoloured bits of paper before it, ruffling the surface of never-drying puddles. "What a horrid place!" said Nadya, and I said half-heartedly that perhaps it only looked horrid because we were not used to it.

I came to Newcastle with the grand idea of keeping the Embassy informed of what the North thought about Russia: this was the time when Civil War was raging and the British Government contemplated dispatching an Expeditionary Corps. But I soon discovered that my idea was stupid. The

North did not think anything about Russia, being absorbed in much more important matters, such as prices of steam coal, the fight between the Arsenal and Leeds, and the birthday of Alderman Newman. Only very rarely did one find, lost between these items, a laconic communiqué from Odessa via Bergen (Russian news always travelled by devious routes) to the effect that General Kkhvalisniikn had retreated to Kuorddle. Since the former was the—mutilated—name of a town, and the latter meant nothing at all, one was not much wiser.

My job at the Consulate proved to be a sinecure. When a Russian ship came into the Tyne I would stamp a few documents, distribute letters amongst the crew and chat with them; when there was no ship I waited for one to come, wrote the third version of my novel, and listened sceptically to the Consul's prediction of the imminent downfall of the Bolsheviks. He and his family were the only Russians in the town, and the only people we knew for several months. We were in no hurry to make new acquaintances: we felt so relieved at the ghost of poverty having retreated from us that we were quite happy to live alone. We stuffed with waste and rubber-tubing the countless chinks under the doors and in the windows; Nadya sewed; Jennie hummed cosily in the kitchen; Xenia toddled about singing in a very unpleasant voice and doing all sorts of mischief. One day, finding a box of floor-polish, she painted her pillow-case with it, and then her own face; when some of the polish got into her eyes, she rushed blindly on to the landing and rolled down the whole length of the staircase. On another occasion Nadya found her black in the face and suffocating: deep down in her throat a gold spot could be seen, the top of the rectangular cross which she was wearing and had managed to tear off its ribbon. There was no time to call the doctor or even to think, so Nadya did what instinct told her to do (mothers, listen!): she took Xenia by the legs, held her upside down, and shook her. The child choked, coughed, was sick and spewed out the cross. Was that symbolical? I wondered, but had the prudence to keep that question to myself.

In the way of friends, Nadya had a stroke of luck: the very first English people she got to know were the Gills, a charming family, as united and homogeneous as the Shan Ghyreys, alive in a non-northern way, full of high spirits and friendliness. They accepted Nadya at once as one of them, in a truly Russian manner. The girls, particularly the two elder ones, Dorothy and Phyllis, used to call on us in the evening, settle on the floor by the fire, eat monkey-nuts, and talk all together at such a speed that I could not follow them. They were effusive girls and had a foible for superlatives: things to them were either luscious, heavenly and angelic, or mouldy, horrifying, abysmal; but that was only the family mannerism, not distortion or affectation; their values were right, their feelings sincere. "I can't imagine what I should have done without them," Nadya often says. They are still her friends, and always will be. They were the first people who made me waive the preconceived notion I had imported from Russia: that the English were all cold.

A Russian boy used to call on us at that time, a student at the local university, who bore the sonorous name of Alexander Makedonsky (the exact Russian equivalent of Alexander of Macedon). Despite his name he was modest, shy, taciturn, and intelligent, though not remarkably so: in fact, a normal youth. But he was also a medium and used to give *séances* in our room. We would dim the light; he would settle comfortably in an armchair and almost at once plunge into a trance. "I am awake, ask me questions," he would announce in a slow sepulchral voice quite unlike his own.

He only answered abstract questions; personal matters were ruled out as unimportant. The system of philosophy he propounded was not unlike Yoga. God had no place in it. He does exist, but man's mind is too weak to know anything about Him. Good and Evil are but words of ill-defined and changing content, vaguely standing for the processes of Creation and Destruction, which in turn meant respectively rarefaction of matter as it moves towards spirit, and its solidification as it moves away from spirit. Suffering is the

awareness by matter of its relation to spirit. And so forth. It was a very interesting system, and most consistent. All my attempts to trip him up failed: his logic was much superior to mine; he knew what he was talking about; his answers always came pat, without a second's hesitation. What is more, he could read Nadya's and my thoughts. Sometimes while I was reflecting on his answer, he would say: "No, this is not what I meant," and correct my mistake. Or he would say to Nadya: "You are thinking not of the idea but of its particular application," and that would be correct too. After an hour or so Alexander of Macedon would take a deep breath and wake. The séances did not tire him; on the contrary, he said they made him feel refreshed as though he had had a good sleep. When awake he had no recollection of what he had been saying in his trance, and did not care to know. These things simply did not interest him, he had never read Yoga, and when I lent him a book about it he would not read it. His younger brother, he said, used to get into trances unintentionally, without warning: at dinner or in company.

In August, 1920, I went for a trip to Canada on board a full-rigged Russian frigate. Originally the captain had proposed to sail by the southern route, past Madeira and Bermuda, but when we left the Tyne, to everybody's surprise the helm was put a-starboard and we went north. This was a precaution against our being intercepted in the open sea by the Bolsheviks, a precaution not quite as unfounded as it might seem. For the week before, three Bolsheviks had come on board the frigate when only the watchman was aboard; they had pulled down the Russian flag, hoisted the red ensign, and one of them had then run to fetch the police, who in the circumstances would, willy-nilly, have had to protect them as the actual occupants against any violence on the part of the former crew; then, before the case was heard in court, the Bolsheviks hoped to put their own crew on the ship, take her out of British waters, and that would be that. This ingenious plan broke down, however, because just before

the arrival of the police two mates came back; they tore down the red ensign and kicked out the Bolsheviks.

We went to the Orkney Islands, turned west, and a fortnight later found ourselves off Greenland. The temperature—this was in August—dropped to thirty-five degrees; the ship had no heating of any kind, and the linen in the cabin was icy and wet all through. A western gale was blowing, and in a week we advanced twenty miles. Then the wind veered to north-east, and lightly, without any effort, the frigate swished along at the rate of sixteen knots, a truly delightful experience. At night, the Aurora Borealis spread its gigantic fans over the sky; fantastically shaped icebergs—white solidified dreams—thronged on the horizon; a whale raced us within a stone's throw of the ship; twice we saw the famous Green Ray which the setting sun sends out as it dips into the ocean. I spent my time shivering with cold, scrubbing the old paint off the teak wood, and listening to sea stories. There was a young Russian sailor among the crew who told us how at the outbreak of the Revolution in Odessa the sailors of the commercial steamer on which he was serving had gone ashore, smashed a chemist's shop, and requisitioned a huge stock of cocaine. In the evening the ship turned into a Bedlam; they staggered about yelling, quarrelling, and firing at each other; one fell overboard, several were wounded. "How did they get to know about cocaine?" I asked, and he said: "Through a schoolgirl who was staying with them. She had a box of it and had showed them how to use it. . . . It was a filthy business," he ended and spat indifferently over the railings.

And here is a story I heard from the first mate, a middle-aged Englishman. In 1900 or so he had been boatswain on board a windjammer plying between Liverpool and Australia. When they were loading at Melbourne, one of the men, a grim taciturn Finn, went ashore to a dentist's and asked him to pull out all his teeth. The dentist pulled out half and told him to come back on the following day. But the captain got wind of it, repaired to the dentist's and threatened to sue him for aiding and abetting a deserter, since with all his teeth out

the Finn would have been entitled to break his contract, which was for the return journey. "But why are you so particular about keeping him?" asked the dentist, for there was any amount of unemployed sailors at Melbourne. "It's because of my wife," the captain replied. "She's going with us and will be having a baby on the way, and the Finn is the only one who knows about these things." So the Finn stayed on board with half his teeth out.

They sailed home via Cape Horn. Not far from South America they were becalmed. Day passed after day, and there was not a breath of wind. Calm always demoralises the crew on board a sailing vessel; so in this case too the men slackened and started grumbling. The old man drank the whole day long, and went about scowling darkly because the baby was considerably overdue. The atmosphere on the ship became thick with discontent; the captain knocked down one of the men, and it looked like mutiny, but at the critical moment there was a shout: "Tidal wave coming!" and indeed a dark wall could be seen rushing towards the ship from aft. "Fix the sails!" shouted the captain; the crew ran to the ropes, the captain's wife who was knitting by the mast gave a scream and rushed down into the cabin, where she in no time produced a boy: there was even no need to call the Finn.

I stayed on Canadian soil between four and five hours—probably the world record for a visit to the American continent—and went back by liner. She was disgustingly comfortable—a kind of Imperial Grand Palace Hotel, with the difference that for six days you could not leave the nasty place.

I finished the third version of my novel and did not think much of it. Nadya worried about her people. Half of them were now in South Russia; Irina with her two children in Vladivostok. Leo was dead ("Good!" I said callously on hearing the news); the train in which he was crossing Siberia had been intercepted by the Bolsheviks; he had been taken out with a group of White Officers and led to a wood to be shot.

A friend of ours, a well-off man, volunteered to do a good deed and arranged for the passage of Irina to Newcastle. One

day she arrived with her two boys, aged four and two. In Vladivostok they had been living in a dark basement, of which the earthen floor was saturated with water from the sewer: a board was laid from the bed to the door; it emitted a squelching sound when one stepped on it. Irina worked all day in a railway office; the two children crawled from bed to the trunk and back again: they could not be trusted to keep their balance on the narrow board. When they arrived in Newcastle they were as white as paper, shuddered nervously at every noise, and shrank from everybody. Even their crying was different from that of ordinary children: it was not crying but sustained, desultory howling.

With their arrival strict economy became imperative in our household. We dismissed Jennie; she offered to stay for her keep only, but that could not be accepted. Nadya worked like a slave; the house was far too small for two families; and as I hate howling children more than anything in the world, I stayed away from home as much as I could. I played chess with the Consul or roamed about the country, or, on Saturdays and Wednesdays, watched the workmen play football on the Town Moor. I could watch them for hours, not because the game interested me, but because I liked the spirit of rough spontaneous friendliness in which it was played. It was the same spirit which I had liked amongst the sailors of the *St. Nicholas* and the men of the Red Cross detachment. Yet their attitude to the game was different. Whilst the Russians, mujiks and Lytzeyans alike, played simply for the sake of movement and fun, the English played to win. Hence, of course, a greater concentration and higher efficiency.

I went to see a proper football match and left in disappointment. In a multitude of 35,000, only twenty-three—counting the referee—were engaged in sport; the rest were merely indulging in vicarious fighting: spectators of a bloodless gladiator show. This is what games are bound to degenerate into if taken too seriously, in a spirit of competition and records.

I never could raise any enthusiasm for golf. As I see it, golf has nothing to do with sport, but is a complex social game,



consisting of changing (before and after the event), some pontifical manœuvring with a stick (during), and an immoderate amount of repetitive talking (after). An expression of dignified self-contentment seems to be an integral part of the game. If you are very clever at hitting the tiny ball you are paid more than Cabinet Ministers. (Why?) I hope that the day when a golf club is opened on the north Col of Mount Everest, our planet will split into pieces or do something equally energetic about it.

Irina stayed with us for a year, and then the unavoidable happened: in the autumn of 1921 the Consulate closed down and I was free once more. I went round the offices in Newcastle. Hard-eyed, square-jawed captains of commerce eyed me with stolid mistrust. A Russian? No doubt I could perform all sorts of tricks, but to have a Russian in their office was like . . . like keeping a walrus in a respectable house. They said Sorry and Good-bye.

My capital had shrunk to £200 by now, and I foresaw a long period of unemployment. In the circumstances it was clear to me that I could not and had not the right to keep another family. Nadya almost agreed with me—I say “almost,” because at the back of her mind she still entertained the hope of some Providential interference. Anyhow, after long and painful reflections and discussions we sent Irina and her children off to Tunis, the place where the rest of the Shan Ghyrey family had landed after their evacuation from the Crimea. We guessed what sort of life was awaiting her there, and I who bore the moral responsibility for the decision felt a criminal. When she had departed, Nadya broke down and stayed in bed for a fortnight. Tess, John’s wife, nursed her.

When I look back at these two years in Newcastle I see that I utterly wasted them. I tried to live a bourgeois life at the wrongest moment imaginable, and I failed in two senses: I did not find the bourgeois contentment—because it is not in my nature—and I did not prepare myself for living without the

backing of Russia. Much later, when John became an intimate friend of mine, he said to me:

"I often wondered why you didn't do something about it whilst you were at the Consulate."

I countered by the question: "Why did you not suggest it to me at the time?"

"Oh well," he said, "you know how one's afraid of butting into other people's business."

I said that was frightfully English, and he agreed without taking offence: for he was a broad-minded man. Then he added: "To be quite frank, I couldn't see what there was for you to do."

And we both laughed.

## THE BREAK

**T**HUS one after another the threads that connected me with Russia were snapped. First, I had broken away from the Russian colony, then I had lost my Russian job, and now Irina was gone. From this moment onwards my life, except for one intermezzo in 1925, passes almost entirely in an English environment. And accordingly the tempo and the character of my narrative will have to change.

So far, when dealing with Russia, I had an *embarras des richesses* in the choice of "striking," "interesting" episodes. For lack of space I have left out some of them: I have not described how a priest had expelled demons from a peasant woman; how a duel was fought between two officials of the First Department; how, on account of Anya's lover, I paid a visit to the dreaded Third Section, the Imperial mother of the Che-Ka; how at the Lytzey Baron F. tried to poison himself after reading too much Schopenhauer. I have not exploited the numerous dramatic events in Nadya's family (she would not let me), or her rural reminiscences: fires, encounters with wolves, bandits and ghosts, stories of devastating loves and Asiatic jealousy. Nor have I touched upon the vast epoch of the Russian emigration with its contrasts of cruel suffering and farcical humour, moral greatness and infamy, superhuman courage and abject flabbiness. I could write several books about it—Leo's tribulations alone are good for 500 pages of the strongest stuff—but I will not do so, for the very prosaic reason that I have no private income, and the English public won't read anything whatsoever about non-Soviet Russia.

From now onwards this "colourful," sensational element disappears from my life. For I live in a country where enamoured youngsters do not snatch out revolvers the moment they feel thwarted; where brilliant jurists like Tavrov do not indulge in fantastic conversation and relationships, and life in general is quiet and business-like—has to be, for England

is overcrowded, and you cannot wave your hands about in a place packed with people and things. And the inner life of the Englishman is quiet too; from his childhood the sense of neighbourhood is cultivated in him, he is severely discouraged from developing just those qualities which make for "colour" in man: the qualities of unbridled imagination, vehement self-assertion, ideological frenzy. That is to say, he is civilised.

The Russian tends to extremes: saints and villains, fanatics and anarchists abound in Russia. The Englishman is taught to gravitate to the *via media*, to the Average Man. Hence his feeling of unease when he differs too much from many: he is happiest when he is undistinguishable in the crowd. Hence also his tendency—often mistaken for humour—to grin at any deviation from the norm—a half-hearted grin, since he knows, of course, that the more fully men assert themselves, whether in good or in evil, the less laughable they are.

The Russian is greedy for life and experience: he values life chiefly for the variety and intensity of thoughts and emotions which it enables him to pick up. Contrast is a favourite medium of his: he feels at home in contradiction, conflict and chaos.

The Englishman has a strong sense of shapeliness (*cf.* the exaggerated insistence of English literature on "construction"). Organisation of life means more to him than its contents; he easily puts up with an "ordinary" existence, since, no matter how humdrum, it can be moulded into a definite shape, whereas rebellion always partakes of disorderliness. He thinks the Russian greed for life futile and rather obscene; the Russian finds his acquiescence dull.

The Russian greed for life is conditioned by mental restlessness. Spiritually he is a nomad. He is never satisfied with what he is and does, he always wants to be and do something else, not necessarily in the name of some idea, but because he is made that way. Hence the perpetual strain in his nature, and an aptitude for wearing himself out.

The Englishman possesses to a high degree the capacity for contentment. He knows how to enjoy what he has got: the rock garden of his villa does not make him long for the

Andes; his feeling of duty fulfilled does not turn into contempt for the smallness of his achievement. It is this contentment rather than sport and fresh air in his bedroom which makes him preserve himself physically so much better than the Russian does. In Russia a man is old at fifty-five, in England at seventy. It took me a long time to learn how to estimate the age of the English: at first I always put it much lower than it was.

Speaking in general, the Englishman lives at a slower tempo than the Russian (one is tempted to add: because his social civilisation is so much older than that of the Russian). Which mode of life is "better", and whether extra experience outweighs or not contentment and shapeliness, is a futile question: obviously mankind needs both types of man.

My narrative will also have to change in another respect: its centre of gravity will shift further and further away from my environment to myself, from events to inner states. This has nothing to do with England, but only with my growing up. A baby is an undifferentiated organism entirely conditioned by its surroundings, and therefore, biographically speaking, only the latter are of importance. In a child and an adolescent, personality is still a promise rather than a fact, so that the biographical stress must still be laid on the surroundings and not on character. As he grows, however, man gets more and more enfranchised from the power of environment, which accordingly recedes more and more into the background. He begins to determine himself rather than be determined from outside. Therefore, even if my subsequent years had been as adventurous as their predecessors, I would still devote less attention to events and more to my inner growth than I have done so far.

## PART FOUR

*"The Lord regards not merit or demerit, nor do men suffer because of sin,*

*"But because their knowledge is veiled with ignorance."*

—THE BHAGAVAD-GITA.



## COMMERCE

**I**N the Russian bureaucracy man carried little weight by himself: he was but a digit which acquired its significance from the figures behind him: influential relatives and friends. It is exactly the same in the world of private business (in England and elsewhere). I would never have obtained a job had it not been for an important man deciding to help me. He spoke to someone on the Exchange, and what I had not achieved in several months was done in one day: the coal-exporting firm of Messrs. Bryant (their real name) took me on at the princely salary of £3 a week.

The clerks at Messrs. Bryant's were what clerks ought to be: dullish but nice. Mr. Sharp, the bookkeeper, under whom I worked, was the nicest of them, and a musician into the bargain. They were all genuinely fond of their boss, Mr. Bryant, who was indeed an exceptionally pleasant man, a gentleman with no Olympic nonsense about him, always ready to exchange a joke with them, tell them of some funny incident on the Exchange, or mildly tease Sharp for his shyness. One day he called at Sharp's room, sat down on one of those idiotic high stools which are supposed to develop commercial acumen in the clerks, and questioned me at length about farming in Russia. When it was time to go: "Don't you hate it all?" he asked, nodding at the files, and without awaiting my reply: "If you don't you are a lucky man, luckier than I, anyhow."

On another occasion he brought his Irish setter puppy into the office. The puppy, enervated by the unfamiliar surroundings, wandered restlessly about the place and ended by misbehaving in the corner of Sharp's room. I knew what would happen. Mr. Bryant would tell Sharp to see that something was done about it, Sharp would repeat this injunction to the boy, who would go and find the charwoman—or not find her and do the job himself. But I was wrong. All Mr. Bryant



said when he saw what had happened was "Damn the beast!" He went out, returned with a pail of water and a rag, knelt down in the corner, wiped up the mess and got up groaning: he was getting on in years. "I'm very sorry, gentlemen," he said. So when later on he asked me to execute some petty commission for him, such as paying a personal bill or taking a parcel somewhere, I never resented it, although it was not really my job. I liked and respected the man; strict book-keeping, therefore, was not necessary with him.

Bills of lading, ledgers, invoices, insurance premiums and foreign drafts—it was interesting at first, but only at first, until I discovered that commerce was essentially repetitive. You opened the files for 1920, 1919, 1918 and so on, and you saw the same invoices and bills of lading and insurance slips, with different figures perhaps and different names. Also I discovered that I hated figures: an hour of adding up made a cretin of me.

The right line for me, I decided, was foreign correspondence, since there was a little more variety in the letters than in figures, and also I had the advantage of knowing two languages already. So I set out to learn the commercial terminology of these two languages. I learned that a bill of lading is for some reason *connaissance* in French, that an invoice is not *une addition* but *une facture*; that you do not send money but *vous faites une remise*; and so forth. This was easy, and soon I could do the letters as well as Mr. Gallagher, the elderly foreign correspondent of the firm. But since there was not enough work for the two of us, my boss spoke about me to Messrs. Grant, a big shipping firm; they offered me £5 a week, and I went over to them.

In the new firm I had to work very hard indeed, for the directors had made it a condition that I should learn Spanish, Italian and shorthand, and I was keen on showing them how quickly I could do it. Accordingly all my evenings and week-ends I spent poring over the grammars and commercial textbooks, and at the office I used every free moment to practise shorthand (I was learning it by myself). In eight months' time I was able to cope with any letter in four

languages, an achievement which to my annoyance impressed no one.

Languages interested me, and I proceeded to learn them properly, not for commercial use only. The right way to do it is to speak, so for once I abandoned my principle of personal relationships, and concluded a purposive friendship with several Latin Consuls. La Brière, the Frenchman, was a normal human being, and we became real friends in time. He was lean and tall, with enormously long legs, a four-inch nose, and a small head—a combination which made him look like a huge sad bird. He had an old-fashioned, over-emphatic grace of manner, recited Verlaine in a morose voice, and went for terrifically long walks at week-ends. The other Consuls were much more exotic. The one I liked best and saw most was Don Jaime, the Spaniard, a sturdy toreador with fiery, almond-shaped eyes, broad shoulders, and very small feet and hands—a sign of breeding in Spain. He was good-natured, easy-going, and incredibly lazy. The idea at first was that we should teach each other and talk Spanish and English alternately, but the English part of our conversation was usually over in two minutes. English was too much for Don Jaime. "It isn't a language, it's *una barbaridad!*" he would cry, rolling his r's and his black eyes. "No rules, no *gramática, nada, nada!*" He did not try to understand English life, let alone adapt himself to it—he simply denied it. It was not life at all, but some low variety of anabiosis, intermediate between sleep and death. "Look at them, look!" he would say as we walked along the street. "They don't smile, they don't even talk, they're just corpses!" And the English climate! "*Dios mio*, what climate! And food! The poorest peasant in Toledo would not eat the stuff they serve at the best hotel in Newcastle. And the women! *Son hermafroditas y no mujeres!*" As for their legs, in Spain only grand pianos had such legs. Don Jaime knew all about English women, for he had had a mistress, the wife of a second mate, but he had given her up: she was as cold as fish, as an icicle—and with Latin matter-of-factness he would go into the technical details of her amative inadequacy. The English thoroughness

was a myth. For three weeks—three weeks, only think of that!—they had been mending the road in front of the Spanish Consulate, and it was not done yet! *Es terrible eso*; the noise of it drove Don Jaime quite mad, so that he only called at his office between noon and one, when the workmen were having their lunch, to sign the papers his secretary had prepared for him. That secretary of his was, according to him, a donkey, a thief, and a brigand (all of which was probably correct); still Don Jaime kept him: it was too much of a bother to get a new one. When the secretary fell ill—which happened quite often, for he had a mistress at Blyth and some shady business in West Hartlepool—Don Jaime would feel lost and apply for my help! From my office I would go to his Consulate, and we would open the post, which usually consisted of a couple of letters from the Consulate-General and the Foreign Office in Madrid. “Now look at that, just look!” Don Jaime would exclaim indignantly, prodding at the letters. “*Que idiotas!* They can’t even write, it has no sense, it’s *una barbaridad!*” The letters were indeed more involved than any circulars I had ever handled in the Russian Ministries. Still we would decipher their meaning in the end. “Now what am I to answer to these *idiotas?*” Don Jaime would ask, and I would draft a reply the simplicity of which made him beam “*Magnífico! Excelente!* Just what I wanted!” and he would pat me on the back. “You’ve got a head, you know . . .” Anyhow, in a year’s time I spoke Spanish fluently.

The relations between the Latin Consuls were an interesting study. They were like monkeys, playing together one moment and hitting each other the next. The Argentinian had a fight with an Italian student, in the course of which he bit the Italian’s finger, but in exchange got a few nasty kicks on the shin. Don Jaime stood up for the Argentinian. Life, he argued, would become impossible if any wretched student could attack the Consul of a great country with impunity. He talked of boycotts, duels, legal prosecutions, and an appeal to the British Foreign Office, and quarrelled with the Mexican who had an old feud with the Argentinian and held that the

fellow had got what he deserved. The Doyen of the Corps Consulaire, the aged Senhor Maralho, convoked an extraordinary meeting of the Corps, in the course of which Don Jaime called him a *burro* (ass), the Chilean Consul applied the epithet murderer to the Italian, and the aged Brazilian had a heart attack. The meeting broke up in tumult. And the next day Don Jaime suddenly discovered that the Argentinian was a swine after all, so he made peace with the Mexican and together they wrote a rude letter to the Brazilian in which, amongst other things, they hinted at his having nigger blood in his veins . . . Often, when talking to them, I had the feeling which I get when looking into the eyes of a cat, the feeling of my utter incapacity to penetrate into the mental world behind those pupils.

Apart from the Gills, the first natives—Novocastrians, they called themselves—whom Nadya and I got to know were disappointing. They were a hundred per cent middle class, standardised to the same pattern, with their minds running along the same, everlastingly the same grooves: children, servants and chintzes (women); and golf, cars and weather (men). I could not stand them: an hour of their “cosy” chat sufficed to turn me into a wicked misanthropist. Nadya was more tolerant. They were not bad people, she thought, and as for their talk—oh well, you needn’t listen to it; you just went on sewing and occasionally put in one of those short locutions, abundant in the English language, which are meant to keep conversation rolling without contributing any sense to it whatsoever: “Oh, indeed!—Isn’t she?—Don’t you?—How interesting.” One could go on for hours saying nothing else, and everybody was happy.

The mistakes we made in choosing our first acquaintances were due to the fact that we did not yet know how to read the English. In Russia we had never had contact with the middle class, we were not used to convention, and so now we were apt to regard every eagerly-propounded question as a sign of genuine interest and assume that a smile and an affable countenance must have an emotional

reality behind them. Which, of course, was very naïve.

Our first relationships grew—as it usually happens—spontaneously. We became friends with Sergey Ivanich, a lecturer at the local university, a quiet unobtrusive young Russian. He soon moved over to us, and proved to be a very pleasant and convenient lodger. Most of his time he spent in his room smoking a smelly pipe, listening to the wireless, and calculating atomic weights—all at the same time. His capacity for sleep was astounding: at week-ends he used to sleep eighteen hours, and once he slept twenty-eight hours on end, without being ill either. By way of relaxation he used to play with Xenia and the cat, teasing them both in a boyish manner, or, if encouraged, harangue on any subject under the moon. He had an encyclopædic erudition, a sceptical attitude to life, and an absolute belief in the value of Natural Science. He was an interesting man—in an uninteresting way.

Then we got to know Dr. Campbell. She was a fine woman, one of the very best. In contradistinction to Sergey Ivanich, she could do without sleep altogether, and without food too. She would call on us in the evening on her way to some case, and then it would transpire that she had been up since five in the morning and had only eaten once. She refused to take money from many of her patients, and as she gave away medicine and made presents to the children she treated, it was a mystery how she lived. The whole town knew her car, for she had no time to attend to it, and it looked as though it had been through a series of big explosions; people used to smile when passing it. Sometimes one met her in a tram or walking, which meant that she had lent her car to somebody for a day or two or a week, she was not sure which. When I once told her that she was a Communist in the true sense of the word, she looked shocked.

There was also John, the Secretary of the University, a Scotlman with an unexpectedly Russian face, a cultured man, intelligent and alive. He had two defects: one, that his views coincided with mine, so that it seldom came to a sustained conversation between us; the other, that I could not

see him as often as I would have liked to: he worked hard and had plenty of social engagements, mostly *ex officio*.

Through him I met a good many members of the University staff. They were a dull lot. In their mental outlook they were hopelessly bourgeois: like the rest of the Novocastrians, they only talked about golf and cars and the weather, tediously describing what the ninth hole was like or how you could get from Blanchland to Alston; and they spent hours, literally hours, discussing some petty event of academic life, such as the salary of the new lecturer in botany or the party at Dr. Swann's. I am sure they were all great scientists, but whether from modesty or lack of interest they never talked about their subjects. Professor X, the psychologist, was the only exception to the rule. He did talk psychology, and I wished he would not, because in his rendering it became stone-dead—man and man's mind were swamped and dissolved in a stream of abstruse nomenclature. He was a Big Man in his line, and had written several thick books; but I knew that if I had a difficult psychological problem to solve I would much rather apply to Isabel, a poor young woman whom Nadya was helping, than to him.

M. La Brière soon left Newcastle, so that I only saw John, and not enough of him either. Nadya was luckier. She had Dr. Campbell, Tess—John's wife—and, of course, the Gills. Women, all of them. Men did not notice her. In Russia, before I had appeared on her horizon, she had had seventeen proposals of marriage, and that without ever going out anywhere; surely, therefore, she must have been attractive in some ways. Yet in Newcastle men ignored her completely. They always kept to themselves, whether in street or at dinner or in the drawing-room. They would say Thank you and Yes, please, to the hostess, they would answer a woman when she asked them a question, they would even dance with her—since they could not very well dance with each other—but that was a concession and condescension on their part: apart from the necessities of the social game they had no use for women; at the first opportunity they turned to their own sex, and eagerly joined in conversation about golf or motoring.

Our life at home was neither gay nor easy. In 1922 Kiril, our boy, was born, and Nadya found herself managing, without a maid, a family of four, plus a lodger, plus an old house ingeniously arranged in such a way as to yield a minimum of results in return for a maximum of effort. She never got enough sleep, for the baby would wake at five, chat till six, and then begin to claim attention. Besides, she was ambitious about her house, she would have it as clean and neat as the other houses were where they had a nurse and a maid. I argued and stormed: the house is for the man, not the man for the house, I said. It was of no avail. "I can't live in a pigsty," she would retort and would tackle some perfectly superfluous work, like cleaning brass which was never used anyway, or mending a decayed stair-carpet instead of burning the beastly thing. She worked fifteen hours a day, sewing, cooking, attending to the children, scrubbing, washing and shopping, everything done in a rush, for if she was a little slow with one job, a dozen others would accumulate in no time. She is a great reader, but at that time she could never get through a book; as soon as she began reading, even if it was in the daytime, her eyes would shut, and I would quietly take the book out of her hand lest it wake her by its fall. . . . My job was to look after the stoves and wash the plates, which as a rule I did with Sergey Ivanich, I handling the mop, he the towel. As he wiped the plates he discoursed on Einstein or Samuel Butler, which was interesting, or on philosophy, which was dull.\*

It was a trying time. Being of a worrying disposition I could not bear to see Nadya overworking herself, and I cursed myself for being unable to provide her with a minimum of comfort. I wished we had no children; I often hated them

\* My children will not figure in these pages any more. They have no real place in my autobiography, since, apart from adding to my cares and duties, they have not influenced my life or outlook in any way. Nor have I influenced theirs—at least, I hope not. They have their own well-defined personalities which they must develop along their own lines, and not mine or anybody else's. When they were little I practically ignored them; as they grow older and pleasanter and mutual understanding becomes possible, we appreciate and grow fond of each other more and more—a type of relationship which is not ideal, but works less badly than one might expect.

for the work they gave Nadya, and easily lost my temper with Xenia, who seemed to delight in being a nuisance, so that when she upset or smashed something, or came in with muddy shoes, leaving traces on the carpet, Nadya's first preoccupation was to get me out of the room. Swearing under my breath—or above it—I would go and plunge into some Spanish or Italian book.

When looking back I always wonder how she could stand those two or three years until Kiril had grown from a baby to a child. She was not strong physically, and not used to rough work from her childhood as the women of the lower classes are, and yet she beat them at their own game. "But then she has spirit," her friends used to say, and that must be right. Her grandmother, of whom she is a living copy, had, on account of spine trouble, to wear an iron corset all her life; nobody noticed it, and, what is more, she gave birth to two children with the corset on. Peasants used to come to her from afar for advice and help; she cured them by laying her hands on them. . . .

What I missed particularly in Newcastle was nature, untamed nature, such as I had been used to in Russia. In Finland, as I have described, the wilderness began at our garden gate; and near Petrograd I knew a place, a clearing in the wood, from which one could see the glittering dome of St. Isaac's and at the same time hear the hazelhens rummaging in the bushes. In England, even in the North, nature was civilised. To begin with, getting out into the country was a lengthy and disheartening process. You walked for an hour through suburbs and suburban villages, along a hard asphalt road, between walls, fences, and hedges, with lorries and motor-bikes thundering, hooting, raising clouds of dust, and filling the air with chemical smells. Then you were in the country, but you still had to keep to the thundering asphalt, since the fields in front of you were sown, the meadows on your right were defended by a combination of hedge and barbed wire, while posters planted in the alluring grove on your left threatened you with Prosecution for Trespassing.



You walked for another hour, and came at last to an unbarri-caded wood; in a spirit of youthful adventure you plunged into it, only to find that the trees came to an end after 200 yards and you were again facing fields and meadows with hedges, barbed wire, and sheds. Even further away, on the moors that stretch along the Roman road to Carlisle, one always saw something to remind one of man: a stone wall, a track, a farmhouse. Only in the Cheviots and the Lake District did I find places lonely enough for my taste, where I could have a sun-bath and walk naked singing at the top of my voice.

In 1923 I spent three weeks in France as M. La Brière's guest. First he took me to Burgundy, to his sister's estate. There were four girls there, four equally pretty diminutive *vicomtesses*, who looked like dolls and had a rare capacity for doing nothing at all: they used to spend the whole day in the same shady corner of the park, lazily playing with a terrier, yawning, and stretching themselves. Sometimes one of them suggested a game of croquet; they would discuss it for a long time, but in the end they always decided that it was too hot.

From Burgundy we went to the Pyrenees and stayed two days in the *château* of La Brière's elder brother. The La Brière family dates back to Charlemagne; the *château* was fifteenth century, dark and most uncomfortable; but the life in it was certainly not aristocratic. The host would sit down to meals in the same shabby, dirty alpaca coat in which he had walked the whole day in the fields. Madame, a corpulent lady, would complain of her perspiration and relate the gossip she had heard from the postmistress. The four-year-old daughter of the house would stretch out for the jug of claret and help herself, liberally spilling the wine on the tablecloth. "*Ah, mais qu'est-ce que tu fais donc!*" the mother would cry, and give her a sonorous slap on the hand or the head, whichever was nearer.

From the estate we went into the mountains and walked for ten days along the Spanish frontier, without any maps,

following the sheep-tracks, keeping away from the main roads and sleeping in derelict sheds or under the rocks. "Where are we going now?" I would ask La Brière, and he would make a semi-circular gesture with his long arms and say sadly: "*Ah ça, je ne sais pas. Nous le verrons.*" He was a great walker, a born mountaineer, and forty miles a day was child's play to him—he could do seventy. One day when the Sirocco was blowing from Spain, I fainted half-way up the mountain. He took my rucksack, helped me on for a couple of thousand feet, and on the plateau, while I was resting, climbed an extra peak to see what the view was like.

The Pyrenees were wonderful. There were moments when I felt what a believer must feel in the presence of God.

The staff of Messrs. Grant consisted of three directors and some twenty clerks. Probably they were different from each other in private life, in their drawing-rooms or their beds, but at the office they somehow all became alike: stiff, wooden, inhumanly dull—robots for manipulating documents and figures. The three High Robots permanently wore a grave expression on their faces and talked in a special rasping voice devoid of any modulations. When there was nothing to do, they sat in their spacious study, smoked, and stared in front of them with the same look of grave preoccupation. They only came to life when an important customer was ushered in: then they all beamed in the same unnatural manner and tried to look benevolent and kind. The Low Robots imitated them, the more successfully the older they were and the more responsible their jobs. The office boys were bad at the game, in fact they were quite human.

I worked in a room with three other clerks. One was Stilton, the head of the Correspondence Section, a steady, reliable worker, a pillar of office virtues. He was always the first to arrive and the last to go. He never made a mistake, could not make one. Every letter that passed him he read twice or three times, with a look of desperate concentration in his eyes, his jaw set, the muscles standing out in two bumps on his cheeks. Even at moments of leisure his face kept that

strained expression; the only time I saw him without it was one Sunday when I met him in the street with a buxom and very respectable-looking Mrs. Stilton.

Then there was Kearth, the French correspondent, a fussy little man, with protruding eyes and a long nose, a good worker but without Stilton's granite solidity; he had a nasty habit of biting his nails, and they were a terror to behold. And finally Fellink, the freight clerk, a gaunt, sallow-faced Irishman, cantankerous and neurotic, always grumbling and swearing at something, bullying the boys and the typists, and pestering his equals. They did not mind him. "Oh, you know what he's like," they said with a shrug of the shoulders. When he was too much of a nuisance they snapped at him: "Oh, shut up, for heaven's sake!" and immediately dismissed him from their minds. I could not do that. I never managed to forget his presence; the very sound of his voice when he began to fume produced an unpleasant contraction in the muscles of my body and prevented me from concentrating on my work. I knew that this state of constraint—self-consciousness of the worst kind—was weakness on my part; I realised that in this respect I was inferior to the other clerks, and I struggled with myself, but in vain. That is how I am made. It was the same at the Lytzey, where we had a couple of aggressively stupid snobs; and on the *St. Nicholas*, where one of the volunteers was a first-rate cad; and at the Ministry of Agriculture, where there was Karov, that wriggling toady: I had always been acutely aware of them, had always felt the same muscular tightening in their presence. . . . Of course, what I ought to have done was to provoke Fellink to a quarrel and give him a good thrashing somewhere on the landing; that would have done us both a lot of good. But then I happen to hate quarrelling and fighting.

"Good morning," I would say as I came in.

"Good morning," three voices would mutter.

And that, until we exchanged a good-bye some eight hours later, was all my intercourse with my colleagues. At first I had tried to talk to them about this and that, but soon gave

it up. We had nothing in common, absolutely nothing. I found it quite easy to talk to a man of the gas company or a mason—as easy as though they were Russians—and I was on friendly terms with the gardener of some friends of ours; but when I faced the clerks at Messrs. Grant I had the feeling that we belonged to two different planets, and that nothing I might say could be of any interest to them. More than that, I felt they disapproved in advance of all I might say, for they knew that it came from a mentality quite unlike theirs, and they were suspicious of and hostile to everything that lay outside their sphere of interests. Russia was as exotic to them as Nicaragua is to me; yet I can swear that in the eight years of my stay with Messrs. Grant I was not asked more than half a dozen questions about Russia, one of them being—of course—about lemon with tea. The result was that I closed up, and so did they, with me. Occasionally little Kearth would address me with the remark: “Hot to-day, isn’t it?” or the book-keeper, a fat man with the eyes of a good-natured pig, would say: “How are ye keepin’, Gabbsky?” to which I would say: “Thank you, very well.”

With these three men I spent some 280 days a year, or 2,000 hours—about as much as I spent with my wife. Yet apart from their office qualifications I knew hardly anything about them. Not that they kept silence the whole time: they did talk among themselves, and when business was slack they talked quite a lot. But I simply cannot remember what it was about, for I always did my best not to listen, but to think of other things. Kearth at one time had some trouble with his house; Fellink collected stamps, and later on got engaged to a girl; Stilton, I think, played bridge on Sundays. Diseases were the purple patches of their existence: after being ill they would discuss it for a week: “The first day the doctor told me. . . . So I rang up the doctor in the morning. . . . He said two tablets at a time. . . .” And that is about all my memory has retained after my listening to them for eight years. When I read Priestley’s *Angel Pavement* I was amazed to find that one could fill pages and pages with the clerks’ chat and make it both interesting and lifelike—so lifelike

that sometimes I thought Priestley must have overheard my colleagues.

Towards five, an atmosphere of nervous expectation would spread about the office. Kearth would dash out every minute into the general room to investigate the prospects. Mr. Anderson, he would report, had 'phoned for his car and that was a good sign. But then Mr. Ainsley—they never omitted the "Mister" when talking about their bosses—was going through the Paris file, and of course he would dictate some bally letter about that Dunois contract and keep them all for another hour. Fellink fumed and cursed, his face twitching, his sullen eyes roaming restlessly in search of a victim on whom he could vent his spleen. Stilton, having finished his work, sat frowning, wondering what else he could do. I tried not to listen, not to see. . . .

They were not bad people, even Fellink was not: I never knew him do anything caddish. They were obliging, too, more so than my colleagues had been in the Russian Ministry—always willing to read off a copy or help one to decode a telegram. It was not kindness, however, nor friendliness, but only mental momentum: so long as they were in the office they took to work automatically, as a man takes to swimming when he has reached deep water: there was nothing else for them to do, and besides, time passed more quickly if they worked. It was just that mechanicality of all their reactions that made them so terrible. And to think that I, an intelligent man, a Lytzeyan, one of the most promising young men in Petrograd, should have been condemned to their company! The thought was bitterness.

"Good morning."

"Good morning."

"Anything I can do?" I would ask Stilton.

He would pass me a batch of foreign letters to be translated into English for the benefit of the High Robots, and I would start typing away: "In reply to yours of the 5th inst, *re* coals shipped per S.S. *Joaquin* . . ."

After that the replies were written: I would be given the

English text to translate into this or that language: ungrammatical verbose compositions, with the same thing repeated over and over again, never saying in ten words what could be said in fifty, full of *clichés* and elephantine diplomacy. Exactly as in the good old Russian Departments, a sentence like: "We are afraid it looks as though your offer might perhaps prove rather on the low side," was considered more polite and elegant than saying simply: "Your offer is too low." Somewhere in the letter there was always a reference to the Unturned Stone: "You may rest assured that we will leave no stone unturned to comply with your wishes," and Kearth, who dealt with France, used to translate it literally: "*Nous tournerons toutes les pierres pour satisfaire vos désirs*," which must have considerably brightened the lives of many clerks across the Channel. Every letter concluded Maestoso: "You may depend upon our giving the utmost attention to your orders, our firm being the oldest and biggest . . ."

So long as I struggled with linguistic difficulties, these translations were rather interesting: to overcome verbal resistance was a kind of sport, also it helped me not to notice my colleagues. But in a year or so my interest began to weaken; in two years, when I could translate almost automatically, it vanished altogether; in three, the job became hateful. The sameness of it was hateful: one wrote to-day exactly what one had written yesterday and the day before and the week before: "In reply to your favour of the 5th inst. . . . rather on the low side . . . no stone unturned . . ."

When the question arose of appointing a special agent for the Mediterranean countries I applied for the job. I was told that I did not know the business enough, and that may have been so; but instead of me they appointed Billert, a relation of one of the High Robots, a youngster who had never been near shipping, did not know Italian at all, knew less French than Kearth did, and was taking lessons in Spanish at the Berlitz school.

I was frightened. Was I to spend all my life in the same room, with the same dismal trio, translating the same ungrammatical letters? I spoke to Mr. Bryant, my former

gentleman-employer; he could hold out no prospects to me. I set my London friends in motion; I subscribed to two employment agencies, studied the columns of Office Vacancies and wrote to the addresses given. Month passed after month; I did not get a single reply.

A sense of doom descended on me. In my mind, Messrs. Grant's office became a prison; Newcastle, the prison yard. At the bottom of our street lived a lame clerk, whose movements synchronised with mine, so that I met him every day on my way to and from the office. I came to dread and hate the sight of that man; his slow mechanical hobbling became to me a symbol of the *inexorable* monotony of my work; I gave up using our street and *went* to the office by a circuitous route. I wished war would break out; I wished Messrs. Grant would go bust or give me the sack; I often wished Nadya or I would die—preferably Nadya, for if it were myself, her position without me would be even worse than it was. Not even at home could I shake off the feeling of my enslavement. Nadya complained that I was getting difficult and gloomy, and I knew that, but could not help it. The office was choking me, crushing my very spirit; I felt it weigh on me day and night. Neither reading nor amusements were of any use; friends I had none, except the ever-busy John; exercise only made matters worse by giving a new vigour to the dejection I was combating. I distinctly felt that the more I struggled with it the stronger it grew—a psychological paradox which I did not understand then, and which I had many opportunities of verifying since.

Therefore, when Captain Mukalov suggested that I should try to get a job with the Soviet Trade Delegation, I did not indignantly reject the idea as I would have done a year or two earlier. Unknown to me, in the four years I had spent under the wing of Messrs. Grant, the whole of my outlook on life had altered. Also the man from whom that suggestion came was worth listening to. He was a real man, for whom Nadya and I had a deep respect. Both he and his stormy career—stormy in two senses—are interesting enough to justify allotting a whole chapter to him.

Mukalov came of a noble and prosperous family. As a youth he joined the mercantile marine—a profession which was not deemed suitable for a nobleman—and a year later was banished to the Far North for belonging to a revolutionary organisation which counted Trotzky and Lunacharsky amongst its members. Three years later he was set free and resumed working for the revolutionary cause. Together with Savinkov, the famous terrorist, a virtuoso in exterminating Cabinet Ministers, he planned the assassination of Plehve, the head of the reaction, but stepped out of the plot at the last moment: he found that he could not stomach the idea of hunting an unarmed man. He gave up politics and went to the northern seas, where he sailed for twenty years. The art of arctic navigation depends largely on a special ice instinct which he developed to an extraordinary degree. As his mate told me once: "The devil only knows how he did it. We would plod for days and days through an ice field, and it was exactly the same all the time, the same thickness and colour and everything. And then he would say: 'There must be clear water three points west.' We would turn three points west, and in a couple of hours we would be out of the ice."

During the war Mukalov was in Archangel commanding the large ice-breaker which kept open communication with England. When in 1919 the Bolsheviks took Archangel, one of their first actions was to seize the ice-breaker, mount a four-inch gun for'ard and send her in pursuit of three ships which had fled a few hours earlier to Europe with a thousand refugees on board, mostly women and children. To deal with them, a hundred armed ex-convicts were stowed in the holds of the ice-breaker; two sailors with revolvers in their hands were attached to Mukalov and followed him even when he went to the lavatory. Nevertheless he managed to convey a wink to the chief mechanic, who went down into the engine-room and by ingenious tampering with the valves reduced the speed of the ship enough to enable the refugees to escape. But they did not escape: at dawn their three ships were discovered standing to, the captains quarrelling with each



other through their megaphones. "Attack them!" shouted the Bolshevik Commissar, a flamboyant little Jew. "Yes, sir," said Mukalov, and went to have a look at the gun. The two sailors with revolvers followed him. "The range is rather long," said Mukalov winking at the gunlayer, a man of his own ship's company. "It is a bit long," said the man winking back, and indeed the first shot from the icebreaker fell a mile short. The Whites opened fire in their turn, with more success: their shell flew right between the funnels of the icebreaker. "Retreat!" yelled the Commissar, his face growing as white as paper. "Yes, sir," said Mukalov, chuckling, and at full speed they steamed back to Archangel. There an infuriated Che-Ka awaited them. Mukalov was chosen as a scapegoat, arrested, and locked up in a hut to be shot in the morning. When I asked him what it felt like to be condemned to death, he shrugged his shoulders. "Nothing particular," he said, "except that I had no tobacco with me." At midnight, however, his crew surrounded the hut, clamouring for his extradition, and, willy-nilly, the Che-Ka had to release him.

But they would not let him alone. Night after night they summoned him and kept examining and cross-examining him, trying to extort from him counter-revolutionary secrets which he did not know, accusing him of aiding and abetting the escape of the refugees, which they could not prove, and of selling Archangel to Great Britain, the evidence of the sale being a box of cigars which a British admiral had given him once. This went on for a month, and they certainly would have shot him in the end had not chance intervened. A steamer had stuck in the ice off Novaya Zemlya; the crew were starving and sending S O S's. Time was of paramount importance, so the big ice-breaker was sent to their rescue with Mukalov in command, he being obviously the best man for the job. It was reckoned that with luck he would bring the steamer back in a month's time; actually he did it in three weeks'. Archangel met him with an ovation, and he, profiting by his momentary security, obtained leave and went to Moscow. Those nocturnal inquisitions at the Che-Ka had

done what years of strain and danger could not do: he had lost his sleep altogether and was unfit for work.

In Moscow he called at the Foreign Office and asked to see Trotsky. What was it about? they asked, and smiled when he said he must have a foreign passport: at that time no one was allowed to leave Russia. "All right, I'll go without your passport," he said, disguised himself as a sailor, and by a devious route went to the last station before the Polish frontier. "Their intelligence service was first-rate," he told me. "I stepped out of the carriage, and there, right in front of the door, stood two Red Guards waiting for me: they even knew which carriage I was travelling in. They took me to the waiting-room and locked me in. It was summer, and the window was open. They often did it, on purpose: the prisoner jumped out, they shot him, and a lot of bother was saved. Still, there was no choice, so I risked it . . ." He stopped at this juncture: he has that exasperating way of stopping just at the most interesting point of his narrative, not for effect but because it does not seem interesting to him. "And you ran away?" I asked. "Yes." "But did they not shoot at you?" (On these occasions one has to drag every word out of him.) "Yes, but they missed." "And did you cross the frontier?" "No, it was too well guarded. I lived in the wood for ten days, eating bilberries, and then had to go back to Moscow." He only got away in the winter, with a faked passport, to Norway, where his wife was waiting for him, and together they proceeded to England.

For his flight from Russia he was liable to be shot by the Bolsheviks. Yet in 1925, when I met him in Newcastle, he was leader of the Soviet Kara Sea Expedition, the one that sailed to Siberia to barter goods. The Soviets simply had to take him: he was the best Russian arctic navigator, of the same calibre as Nansen and Amundsen, and I was told that Lloyd's had offered to reduce the insurance premium by ten per cent if he were given the command. An odd situation was thus created. In the mouth of the Lena where the ships were discharging, the local Che-Ka men would come to his cabin for a free glass of whisky, and say with a merry wink: "Let's

go ashore, captain." "I would love to," he would say, winking back at them, "but I'm afraid your Siberian air doesn't suit my health." For the ships were under the British flag, and so long as he stayed on board he was inviolate.

In order not to break the continuity of his story I shall proceed with it beyond the moment my narrative has reached. The Kara Sea Expedition was repeated three times, and then given up as a financial failure: like every other business, it was hopelessly bungled by the Soviets. Since, however, they could not do altogether without shipping experts, they kept Mukalov in London as their marine supervisor. But only for a year, then he was dismissed. As Mr. Feiner, a German Jew in Newcastle, ship-chandler in a small way and an ardent admirer of Mukalov (he had a monstrously enlarged photograph of him in his dining-room), told me: "Captain Mukalov is no good as a business man. There he is now without a penny in his pocket, and why? He might have made thousands of pounds out of his job as others have done, but no, he wouldn't. Well, I suppose it's a question of honesty with him, and I've nothing to say against honesty, because honesty is a good thing. But why make enemies? He needn't have taken anything himself, but why interfere with other people earning a few extras? And that's what he did: when he found that something was wrong with a bill he wrote about it to the London office, so naturally some people in London got annoyed and put him out of the way. I say it's his own fault."

He has gone through hard times since: had been third mate, boatswain, even A.B. Most of the time he had no work at all and lived like a chameleon, on air. He is apt to get depressed at times from worrying about his family and from his nostalgia for the sea; otherwise he does not mind what happens to him personally; nothing can throw him off his equilibrium or embitter him. He takes his bad luck with a shrug of his shoulders and a humorous remark about the vicissitudes of life. More than any other man I know he remains in all circumstances equal to himself.

What makes him particularly interesting is the astonishing complexity of his nature. He is much more than a stoic and a

sea-dog (a man of iron, his men used to say of him). He is also an intellectual who knows his Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, and will argue with youthful fervour about morals, Russia's destinies, and religion. As a seaman he has risked his own and other people's lives dozens of times and thought little of it; but as an inveterate idealist, a believer in Prince Kropotkin's lofty anarchism, he hates all violence between man and man, he opposes it whenever he sees it, and that is just why he has had trouble with all the governments he had served under: the Tsarist, the White, the Red. He is five foot six, but built on the principle of a cube, and his hand is the hand of a professional boxer. He is absurdly, indecently generous with money, constitutionally unable to decline the request of a loan, and he would live in comfort now if his debtors be-thought themselves of paying their debts; but they do not, since, of course, he has never dreamt of taking an I O U or any other document devised for the benefit of less trusting natures. When he had money he used to drink deep—in company, never by himself—and I know that the only effect a bottle of whisky had on him was to make him walk abnormally straight. Now he declines wine when offered: Not in keeping with the times, he says. A born democrat, he is simply unaware of the existence of social distinctions: I have seen him treat the little Jewish chandler with the same courtesy which he shows to my wife. He loves children, perhaps because there is much of the child in him; and he is a nobleman from head to foot, in manner and thought. . . . I hate writing about him, and I pusillanimously avoid meeting him, for the thought that a man of his calibre should be assigned the part of a pariah by our glorious civilisation upsets all my notions of fairness and makes me want to curse and hit out at somebody, I know not whom.

To return to my meeting with him. At first, when I learned that he was serving the Soviets, I was shocked. Since the beginning of the Revolution I had only dealt with White Russians, and so, by sheer imitation, in exactly the same way in which ninety-nine per cent of people form their political

outlook, I had decided that Communism was all humbug, that the Bolsheviks were bloodthirsty ruffians, and that to work for them was the basest thing man could do. And here was Mukalov, a real man and a gentleman, who seemed not in the least ashamed of being in their pay.

"Why did you join them?" I asked.

"One has to work for one's country," he said.

"But can you work for Russia while they are in power?"

"Why not? We all worked under the Tsars, and the Tsarist officials weren't Russia either."

"But surely the Bolsheviks are worse than the Tsarists?"

"Worse? Oh no. The same, I should say. There are good men and bad men amongst them, as there are everywhere. In about the same proportion. It's true they don't know how to work, but that's because they haven't been trained for work, they're all amateurs."

It was the first time I had ever come across that kind of unprejudiced realistic reasoning, and I was impressed by it, partly, of course, because of the man from whose mouth it came.

"What sort of people have they got in their Trade Delegation?" I asked. "Are they pleasant to deal with?"

"On the whole, No. Most of them are careerists of the new type, which if anything is nastier than the old. They're all paid too well; and their new power rises to their heads. . . . As for business, they have no notion of it, and in the Shipping Department none of them knows a steamer from a samovar."

He gave me many instances of the incredible inefficiency of the Bolsheviks, the appalling waste of money and time.

"The worst thing," he said, "is that they don't want to learn business. They think that once you are a good Communist you can do anything—manage a steamer or a hospital, or both."

"Isn't it disheartening?"

His answer was oblique, or rather I thought it was.

"You do what you can and hope for the best," he said.

"Russia is huge and strong. She's stood centuries of mis-

management, and she'll stand a bit more. . . . You aren't happy in your office, are you?"

"Happy? Good Lord, no!"

"Then I'd apply to them if I were you. Whether they are this or that isn't your business, is it? You'll be working for Russia. At least you'll be trying to work. For they may throw you out at any moment, one never knows with them . . ."

He touched my heroic nerve. As in 1915 I had dreamt of combating bribery in the War Supply Department, so now I was eager to fight the Soviet inefficiency—and incidentally to suffer in the name of my newly-acquired conviction. I applied to the Soviet Trade Delegation in London for a job and told my wife what I had done.

The news depressed her greatly, more than I anticipated. She was White, uncritically White, sticking to that glorified conception of Holy Tsarism which had been inculcated into her by the official textbooks of History and the patriotic traditions of the Smolensk nobility. The Bolsheviks to her were the scum of mankind, criminals who had trampled down religion, murdered millions of innocent people and in particular brought about the ruin of her family. A decent man could only do two things: fight them or ignore them.

We argued. She would not see my point of view, as I myself would not have seen it a year before. Everything Communist was anti-Russian to her, and my going over to the Soviets meant my "selling" myself to them. She stiffened when I told her that according to Mukalov the salaries at the Trade Delegation were rather high.

"Oh, so it's for money that you're doing it!" she cried. "Is it or is it not?"

"Your question is unfair," I said. "You ought to know by now that one can't work without money, whether one serves the Reds or the Whites. As for their salaries, I have to consider that in going to them I'm taking a big risk: they may sack me in a month's time, and after that all the doors will be closed to me. Also you may be sure they'll make me pay heavily for every pound I get from them."

"And you may be sure that I won't take a penny of that money. I'd much rather be a charwoman and starve than live on blood-money."

"You're talking nonsense. Don't you see . . ."

But she did not see, she could only think on the lines of her habits. Our argument grew heated. "It's a caddish thing you're doing!" she cried with tears in her eyes. "Yes, caddish! I didn't know I was married to a cad." I am glad to say that I did not bear her any grudge for these words. But they hurt.

No matter whether Russia be holy or unholy, White or Red, her bureaucracy always works slowly. A month passed before I got an answer from the Trade Delegation (in ungrammatical English). They wanted to see me, and I went to London.

It was a curious, slightly unreal sensation to find oneself in the camp of the enemies of mankind. The atmosphere in the Soviet building was markedly un-Russian, mainly because of the faces: out of ten, eight were Jewish, one had no obvious national character, and only one looked Russian. Whilst I waited in the reception-room, where I had taken a chair close to the corridor, I must have seen some fifty officials pass by me, and they all, Jews and Gentiles alike, had a special look—sullen, heavy, mistrustful. Not one of them smiled or looked cheerful. I tried to talk to the man who had taken my visiting-card; he answered with deliberate reluctance, looking away all the time. Yes, they'll make me pay, I thought to myself with a sinking feeling in the heart.

Finally I was taken to a Big Man. He was a very ordinary Jew, a typical grocer's assistant despite his expensive suit. In uneducated Russian he questioned me on my career and my views, suspiciously watching me all the time from under his eyebrows. He gave me an application form to fill in, and of his own accord offered to refund my travelling expenses. "Did you come first class?" he asked, and when, taken aback at the very idea of travelling first class, I said "No," he suddenly looked good-natured. "Well, we'll pay your first-class fare

back," he said comfortingly. I suppose he enjoyed the opportunity of showing his generosity.

Back in Newcastle, I filled in the application form (some fifty questions, in quadruplicate, if you please!), and sent it to London. Nothing happened for a month, then I was summoned again. This time I was taken to another Big Man, a Lett, with a stupid brutal face and colourless eyes. He had no idea what to do with me; he clumsily fumbled with my dossier, grumbling to himself and clearing his throat with an unpleasant rasping sound as though he were going to spit. "Perhaps he'll be my chief," I thought, shuddering inwardly. At length he pushed the dossier away. "It isn't my business at all; why the hell did they send you to me?" he grumbled, and told me to go to one of the Sections. I went. The Head of the Section had not the faintest idea why I had come to him. He rang up somebody, but could not get an answer, so he went out and stayed away for half an hour. On coming back he asked me with a preoccupied air whether I knew how to keep a card index of orders. I said "Yes." How do you do it? he wanted to know. I said that depended, I must see the Order File first. They had none: the orders were only registered in a notebook, and the files they showed me were in a terrible mess, with letters, invoices and even catalogues mixed up, filed all on top of each other, without any attempt at classification. The Head, a grim-looking Jew with a tropical growth of hair all over his face, chewed his lips and eyed me expectantly. "Thank you," he said when I had told him what could be done. "You'll hear from us in three or four days."

I went back to Newcastle and waited for three or four weeks. There was no news from London. I wrote to the Head of the Section and the Big Man; my letters remained unanswered. I began to guess that nothing would come of it.

But man's psychology, like a physical body, has its momentum. As a ball that has rolled off an inclined plane must continue its movement, so I had to follow the course upon which I had started. I was now in possession of a Soviet passport, and through Mukalov I got to know the Soviet Consul, apparently the only educated man on the whole staff.



To him I explained the situation. "Why don't you go to Russia?" he said, and five minutes later we were discussing my prospects in Moscow. They were far from brilliant: my first salary would be ludicrously small, so that there could be no question of sending anything whatsoever to my family. But even that did not stop my momentum: I deceived myself with the hope that I would make a quick career, and that my family would hold out till then—somehow. All I wanted was an assurance that I would get a job in Moscow straight away, without having to wait for it, and that assurance the Consul was unwilling to give. I saw he disapproved of my insistence; the anxiety which I displayed for my family must have seemed "bourgeois" to him. He said he would write to Moscow and let me know in a week . . . Perhaps I ought to have said that this was at the time when the Soviets seemed to have taken a definite turn towards moderation: hence my optimism.

Two months passed. I wrote to the Consul—with the usual result. I went to London and saw another man. Later on I learned that he was a Che-Ka agent, but he certainly did not look it. He had a quiet, almost timid manner, gentle, sad eyes, the thin emaciated face of an ascetic, and that faraway, dreamy look, the look of a visionary, which is common to many genuine Communists. I asked him bluntly: did they want me or not, in London or in Moscow? And for the first time I received a proper business-like answer. "Frankly speaking," he said, "we aren't keen on having people like you. You've been out of Russia all these years, you haven't gone through our experiences, you're altogether too different from us." I shall always be grateful to him: had it not been for his outspokenness I might have gone on stalking the Russian phantom for another year. As it was, I had wasted a lot of nervous energy during these months of expectation, not to speak of the anguish in which Nadya had been living all that time. And all I had gained was a glimpse of the Bolshevik mentality, that essentially Asiatic mixture of savage fanaticism and childish, babyish incompetence in things practical.

In the circumstances my going back to Russia would have been sheer lunacy. But I still could not give up the idea of it:

the psychological momentum had to spend itself in some action. This action took the shape of a gamble. I saw the High Robots and presented them with an ultimatum: either they gave me a substantial increase, or I was off to Moscow. I do not quite know why they raised my salary to £350, which was not so bad for five years' work. At last one of my dreams was fulfilled: Nadya could have a charwoman twice a week.

I tore up the Soviet passport, set my teeth, and went on assuring various *Messieurs, Señores, Signori* and *Geehrte Herren* of the superior services which our old-established firm could render them. This time I did feel that I had sold myself.

"Good morning."

"Good morning."

And the treadmill would begin: the same room, the same letters, the same faces, eight hours a day, two hundred hours a month, every one of these hours poisoned by protest, impotent, futile protest, punctuated by moments of despair and disgust so acute that I had to make a physical effort over myself not to fling down the papers and walk out with a coarse oath. Had I only had myself to think of, I should certainly have done it and never regretted it. But there was Nadya, and because of her I could not take any risks, and had to bear my slavery as best I could.

One of the few pleasures I had in those years were Lydia's letters. I had got in touch with her as early as 1921, after she had fled from the famine and the Bolsheviks (a boat gliding in the rushes—shots from the shore—crawling under the barbed wire, etc.). She had married at the beginning of the war, and was now in Sweden, where her husband had a modest job at an electrical station. We corresponded, I unburdening myself in my letters of all those black thoughts which I tried—unsuccessfully—to conceal from Nadya. Apart from Mukalov, Lydia was the only person who understood my urge to go to Russia and approved of it—with reservations. "Are you quite sure you have got the strength to live there—the strength and, above all, the faith?" she wrote. "For the Russian actuality is so grim that one must be a visionary to bear it, one must feel

the future more vividly than the present. Are you capable of that? If not, you must not go."

Like most refugees, she lived poorly, but that did not worry her much. "I wish our tablecloth were not so frayed," she wrote, "and sometimes when I remember all the marvellous things I left in Petrograd, I begin to pity myself. In these cases I make myself quickly turn to the window and look at the pine-trees in front of our house, and the silver of the lake shimmering between their red trunks. It's a beautiful lake, and it's practically ours, because nobody ever rows on it except an old Finn with a pipe, who fits admirably into the landscape. That is what you lack in your disgusting stony Newcastle. You would not be half so unhappy if you had Nature, real Nature at your door . . ." The inarticulate girl I had known in 1911 had developed an exquisite epistolary style; her descriptions of her household worries and her children—she had five of them—were gems of light humour. When I complimented her upon her style she wrote back: "That and much more I owe to you, who gave me faith in myself when I needed it most."

To me she counselled resignation. "I know it isn't your strong point," she wrote, "but you have got to grow it in yourself, simply because there is nothing you can do. And it will come when you learn how to look the other way, away from your troubles." The truth of which I was to appreciate later on.

Then a wild letter arrived, wild with joy. A miracle had happened: her husband had been given a good job, in Mexico, of all places! He had left already; she was to follow him, and what was more, via England, and what was still more, she would disembark at Hull, only three hours' journey from Newcastle. "So if you don't come and meet me I'll have to disguise my children as attaché cases, leave them at the cloak-room, and proceed myself to your horrid Newcastle, which I hoped never to see in my life."

This was in August. My family was away in Tunis: Nadya's friends had jointly enabled her to visit her people. The night preceding my meeting with Lydia I did not sleep till dawn for

excitement, and when I woke, the first thing I was aware of were four lines of a poem which stood before the eyes of my mind. They stood as clearly as though they were printed, so clearly that I could read the lines in any order I liked. They were in German:

*“Umhüllt im Nebel schlafen die Fernen;  
Ein düster Schweigen herrscht in der Höh;  
Was kann ich tun um sie zu verlernen,  
Die ferne Sehnsucht, mein schweigendes Weh?”*

For the benefit of those who do not know German well, I may say that this is old-fashioned stuff, of Schubert's period, and of very second-rate quality: rather insipid. Oddest of all, it is mine, unmistakably mine, not imitation and not stylisation. This is particularly odd, as I had never written any poetry in any language and had not spoken German since my stay with the Hertzbergs, that is to say for some eighteen years. . . .

I met Lydia under the heavy portico of the Hull railway station. I had not seen her for fourteen years, but to me she had not altered at all. I kissed her hands and could not stop kissing them, and could not say a word. Five miniature beings stood by and stared at me wide-eyed.

I spent the whole day with her. I only heard part of what she was saying, for when I looked into her attentive grey eyes, the sound of her voice grew dim and her words meaningless. “But you aren't listening to me, my dear!” she cried laughing. The film of time had rolled back: once more I was young and care-free and in love with her, with the difference that now I did not want anything of her, and the prospect of losing her in a few hours did not hurt. “It's a pity we're both married,” I said. “Otherwise we might run over to the Registrar's and do the trick.” “Yes, and have seven children just to start off with,” she said, chuckling. “You would love it I'm sure.”

We talked till midnight, and early next morning I saw her off to the train. Then I went back to Newcastle humming a tune which I had composed for my German poem. At Newcastle, close to our house, there was a baker's shop. I

called there to buy a loaf for my breakfast, then went out into the street, and suddenly tears began to stream from my eyes. It was disgraceful; people stared at me, and yet I did not mind.

We still correspond. She is in Mexico; the chances of our meeting seem to be nil; but I know that I shall see her again and be in love and twenty-two once more. For, damn it all, there is such a thing as undying love, two undying loves, three—as many as you can hold! I pity those who do not know that.

Rodney's family lived in the south, he himself had only recently come to Newcastle, did not like the northerners, and felt lonely. He met us, and we liked each other. He was a charming young man, easy-going, witty, as considerate as a woman, with a quick bright intellect. We became to him a substitute for his home; for us he replaced what we lacked in the way of society and male friendship; he was the holiday element in our humdrum existence. He helped me to get over the collapse of my Russian plans and to forget, if only for the evenings, my drudgery at Messrs. Grant's.

I do not think any English couple could have got as much out of a single relationship as we did. They would not have concentrated on it to such an extent; their pride—or their thrifty disposition of mind—would have precluded them from putting all their eggs in one basket; they would have taken care to insure themselves against failure by keeping up other, more superficial relationships. We had no pride and did not think of insurance. We guessed that we were preparing our own punishment, but . . . but we were Russians.

Our friendship with Rodney remained unclouded for two years. Happy relationships are static, so I will not record that period. And then Rodney started withdrawing from us. He was handsome and young, well-off and witty; society claimed him, had been claiming him all along; it was only natural that he should have obeyed its call. So long as that only meant his coming to us less often, we did not mind. But with time an inner estrangement set in. Superficial contact with people,

participation in the bustle and hustle of the Newcastle plutocracy, brought out in him tastes and attitudes irreconcilable with those which we, two marooned aliens, had formed in our enforced isolation. It was not, as I see it now, a question of either his or our making any "mistakes"; simply that the enormous difference between his and our environments had to tell sooner or later. We did not try to hold him, but neither could we resign ourselves lightly to letting him go. Unconsciously, in spite of ourselves, we pulled him our way, and that he resented. Especially when he realised how much he meant to us. That produced in him a feeling of obligation, a feeling of being tied; he grew constrained and self-conscious with us, and I am sure he often longed to drop us for good, yet could not—out of loyalty, as he probably put it to himself, but as a matter of fact because the momentum of a big personal relationship is not easy to break. Still, the distance between us increased more and more.

This is a pathetic story, and I am deliberately rushing through it, condensing into one page more than a year of nostalgia, regret and pain—quite a disproportionate amount of pain. But then I have thoroughly exploited this psychological situation in one of my novels.

We said to ourselves that what had happened was inevitable, that it had been silly of us to invest so much in one relationship, that he was as little to blame as any young man who opens his heart and then, after a time, discovers that it is closing of itself, against his will. But the sense of loss was there, and the pain was there, both fed by the dreariness of our life. When a car stopped in front of our house, Nadya or I would look out of the window and say with feigned casualness: "It's the laundryman," knowing very well what we had both expected. And afterwards we would go on exchanging trivial remarks to convince each other that the associations which the car had unchained were quite forgotten. . . .

It was a relief to us when Rodney left Newcastle.

"Good morning."

"Good morning."

The same faces, the same letters, year in year out, winter and summer, Rodney or no Rodney, eight hours a day, two hundred hours a month, an infinity of toothache which you can never forget, which is there in your mind even when it has released your body, for your mind knows that it will come back again the next morning, with the inevitability of a tide: Kearth will bite what remains of his finger-nails, Fellink will splutter viciously, the High Robots will. . . . Oh, damn them all, damn, damn! . . .

Rodney's withdrawal hit us the harder as it coincided with other troubles. John had left for the colonies, and I had absolutely no one to talk to. Nadya's people in Africa were snowed under by an avalanche of misfortunes. They were a doomed family indeed, they seemed to attract trouble out of the air; and I could not help them as I had done before, because an all-round reduction of salaries had taken place twice already at Messrs. Grant's within the last two years, and we had been living beyond our income. A swarthy Roumanian with swaying hips and eloquent gestures had persuaded the High Robots to open big depots in distant southern ports at which no ship ever called. From the outset everyone in the office and outside it, on the Exchange, knew that it was a hopeless speculation—everybody except the directors. They went on and on pumping money into the depots long after their uselessness had become evident, and when at last they desisted it was too late, the firm was committed up to its neck. I often feel like writing the history of those exotic depots; it would demonstrate how unfounded is the myth about the efficiency of Private Initiative, a myth which the business men themselves have created by loud and persistent self-praise.

Just when my last savings were going, chance came to my assistance. It so happened that one autumn a lecturer in foreign languages eloped with somebody's wife; the university urgently wanted a supplementary lecturer for evening classes, and since I was on the spot they gave the job to me. I had ten lessons a week: advanced French, for which I was really not quite qualified, advanced German and elementary Spanish.

It was a considerable strain, seeing that my whole day was taken up at the office.

I cheated the authorities by clandestinely using other books than those prescribed by the venerable syllabus. In the French class, instead of Chateaubriand's soporific *Attala* (which, frankly speaking, is utter rubbish) we read extracts from André Maurois' humorous stories; and for the German class I got a high-class thriller with express trains, pearl necklaces and chloroform. I used to keep the thriller locked up, for the students were so keen on the story that they read it at home, and I did not want them to lose interest in it prematurely. One day my chief came in just as the clever gangster was about to jump from the train. We quickly pushed the books under our grammars and pretended to be analysing some abstruse grammatical question. One of the youngsters giggled, but the chief failed to notice anything wrong.

I loved these lessons: they were a real pleasure after the deadly monotony of the office. When in the spring a vacancy for a permanent German lecturer was announced I applied for the job. My German was very good, and I proposed to go to Germany for the summer so as to make it absolutely perfect. But apparently I was not academic enough: my application was refused, and the job given to a short-sighted, chicken-like young man who may have had honours and what not, but spoke German *comme une vache espagnole*. Once more I had failed to get away from my prison.

About this time a man offered me—semi-officially, I believe—some spying work for the British Intelligence Service, who, he said, paid well for any information about the Bolsheviks. I enjoyed our conversation the more since there were rumours in Newcastle that I was a Bolshevik spy.

Sometimes Ada, a young Jewess of eighteen, called on us. She was a lively girl, with an original, arrogant mind, and her fantastic discourses—she did not mind tackling any problem on heaven or earth—amused us very much. One hot summer



day I went with her to the seaside; we spent the afternoon on the sands, chatting, and on the way back I lent her a shilling: she wanted to buy something but had no money with her.

A little later a woman said to Joan, one of Nadya's friends:

"Of course Mrs. Gubsky is frightfully nice but I do think she's a mutt all the same. There's her husband carrying on under her very nose with that Jewish creature, and she doesn't see it. How I know about it? Oh, everybody knows. He never stays at home nowadays, he neglects the children, and I understand there isn't a penny in the house because he gives all the money away to that Jewess. Oh yes, he does: someone—I won't tell you who—saw him do it the other day, quite openly, too. I think it's disgraceful, especially since he has such a charming wife. But then I always suspected that he was a Bolshevik. He looks like one, and Mrs. Brandling says she's heard him say some nasty things about the poor Tsar, whom they had murdered so horribly. . . . I wonder, perhaps it would be better if someone opened Mrs. Gubsky's eyes to what is going on; for if she knows the truth she can put a stop to it before it's too late. I'm a believer in truth, aren't you? . . ."

Then the great slump came: all offices began to reduce their staffs, and my prospects of finding another job dwindled to nothing. I was now definitely fixed at Messrs. Grant's. When I switched my mind off my slavery I would think of Nadya—her unremitting struggle with the huge decaying house we lived in, her desperate efforts to make old clothes look decent, the cold she had contracted through wearing dilapidated shoes, the nice places in the country to which we could not go in the summer; and more reductions to come, more economising, more drudgery for her. One thing which I had preserved intact through the troubles of these last ten years was my love for her, and it was sick now, sick with worry and fear, intertwined with despondency: I felt happy on the few occasions when she went away somewhere for a day or two, because then I did not see her tired face and the never-smoothing creases on her forehead. She could still chat and laugh with

the abandon of a young girl, but her gaiety only lasted while others were there—the Gill girls, for instance; as soon as we two were left alone, I became aware of the strain of cumulative fatigue and weariness in her. She, whom nature had endowed with a truly angelic patience, was growing short-tempered and irritable; more and more often a wistful look would come into her eyes, the same look which I used to combat in Petrograd.

I came to hate Newcastle with an acute personal hatred: it became to me the geographical expansion of my prison. I hated the dismal grey streets, the cold windswept Town Moor, the dull cloudy sky over it. I knew that other provincial towns were no better, while the Russian provinces, not to speak of the French, were worse. But neither Manchester nor Saratov nor Lille affected me personally, and Newcastle did. And there was a woman whom it had killed, a young, vivacious, highly-strung Frenchwoman with a live independent mind. She had the misfortune of having lived all her life in capitals, until she married a little engineer who took her to Newcastle. He earned four pounds a week, and for a family of two that was not so very bad. But she could not adapt herself to the company of her husband's colleagues, draftsmen and salesmen; they horrified her; she spent whole days alone, by the window, staring at the black asphalt of the street, and shutting her ears when the gramophones in the neighbouring houses began to bray. When a man appeared on her horizon who, like herself, came from a capital and had a metropolitan mentality, she promptly fell in love with him; and when he recoiled in bewilderment, she became a prey to acute melancholia, which soon developed into a kind of vicarious persecution mania on behalf of the man. The idea tormented her that a mysterious gang was after him, trying by means of various devilish devices to lure him to Russia and kill him there. She studied the local papers in which the members of the gang exchanged their nefarious communications in the disguise of harmless-looking advertisements about a tooth-paste or a sewing machine; she intercepted their wireless messages through the spring mattress of her bed; she wrote letters of warning to the man, and tried to enlist her neigh-

bours in his defence. I was that man. At our last meeting before they took her to an asylum she stopped me in the hall, and with a look of tense anguish which animated her features with a quick poignant beauty, whispered to me: "If they tell you to go to the quayside, don't go, they're waiting for you there, between the warehouses, to kidnap you. You see, they dropped this," and she showed me a dirty piece of paper which she must have picked up in the street, and on which the word "Quayside" was written. . . . Six months later she died of galloping consumption which often follows madness—one of the few merciful dispositions of Mother Nature.

Even more than the town I hated its bourgeoisie. The very sight of well-dressed men or women in the street or in the tram switched on a current of antagonism in me. For it was they, these smug, hare-brained, thick-skinned boors with banking accounts and motor cars, who wielded the supreme power in the country and used that power to bring life down to the level of their own vulgar mechanised mentality. Gentlemen they called themselves, and to this day I hate the false pretence of this word, which is supposed to stand for some vague moral value but as a matter of fact has degenerated into a complimentary term the bourgeois use to designate each other. And there is another word which I hate even more, and that is Kindness; meaning not the genuine kindness which is inseparable from sacrifice, or rather readiness for sacrifice, but the other, the bogus variety, the Turkish Delight of the sentimentalist, the drug of the complacent "thinker," the hypnotic refrain with which the bourgeoisie lull people into a drowsy acceptance of the existing régime. "He's so kind, he's given me a lift home"—if I have heard this sentence once I have heard it hundreds of times. "How kind of her," they say of the female who has given a pair of old shoes to some beggar, as though these wretched shoes could annul her underpaying and bullying her maids, her refusal to help her sister ("I'm quite broke, my dear, and these income-tax people are simply awful"), the deliberate, ruthlessly systematic selfishness of a hundred per cent of her thoughts, feelings and actions. When I hear the word Kindness I always imagine a

gentleman in the street sympathetically bent over a crying urchin. He produces a penny, gives it to the child, then he unbends, turns, and I see the collective face of the Three High Robots, a face shining with dignity, self-contentment, and pious gratitude to God, the God whose will maintains the prices on the Exchange and makes money flow into the pockets of the righteous. . . .

What with these bitter thoughts, worries about money, anxiety for Nadya, and my hatred for the office, I felt I must take some antidote, or my mind would be poisoned. Hence the idea of writing. The theme I chose was a comparative study of the English and Russian characters.

## LITERATURE

THE notion that Travelling is Useful belongs to the same category of piffle as the slogan Beer is Best. By gazing at a German *Rathaus*, eating French *petits pois* or listening to the jabbering of Italian porters, man, even if he does it for six months in a year, will not add a cubit to his mental stature. To get something valuable from a country he must live there for a long time, and in such a way as to mix with its inhabitants, be influenced by them, feel their likes and dislikes on his skin; otherwise the Arab proverb holds good: A donkey, even if he has been to Mecca, still remains a donkey. (Quoted with apologies to Messrs. Cook and their flocks.)

When after staying for two years in London I came to Newcastle, I fancied that I knew the English. Of course I did not, as was promptly demonstrated by the mistakes I—and Nadya—made in picking out our first acquaintances. Five years later I still did not know the English: time and again I was puzzled by contradictions in their character, contradictions between sympathy and indifference, intellectual curiosity and smugness, sincerity and make-believe. These opposites are, of course, universal, they exist in every nation; but whilst in a Russian, for instance, they are obvious and on the surface, they form in an Englishman a curious amalgamation which is by no means easy to analyse. Only through Rodney and my long affection for him did I get a more or less clear notion of the English character. "The best way of knowing women is to know one woman well," said a Mohammedan expert, and that rule applies to men as well.

I had read several books about England written by foreign observers. They did not satisfy me; even the cleverest of them were superficial, frankly so—chatty, gossipy (and often cynically flattering). They mentioned various English customs and traits of character, added more or less witty comments and half-truths, and left it at that.

I decided I could go one better and get at the very essence of the English mentality by contrasting it with another mentality, that of the Russian. I had just been to London and Mme Kurcheninov had told me a little story which, it seemed to me, would make an ideal introduction to my subject:

"One day I was going in a bus from Maidenhead with Vasya, my nephew who was at Cambridge then. There was a drunken man opposite us who was all the time bullying his wife. He didn't beat her or say anything particularly horrid, he just bullied her in a dull and rather nasty way. Now, I watched the people in the bus, and it struck me that they were all perfectly unruffled. They would glance at the man and then forget about him, look away or read their paper. I'm sure they disapproved of him and would have stood up for the woman if he had started beating her, but so long as he didn't, it was no concern of theirs and they simply felt nothing about it."

"They may have been restraining their feelings," I said.

"I don't think so, they would have given themselves away somehow or other. No, they simply said to themselves: Here's an ugly customer, and that was that. And then I looked at Vasya and at once I saw the difference. He also tried to read a paper and look away, but he could not, he would continually look at the bully and frown and twiddle his fingers. Then he talked to me, and from the way he talked I knew he couldn't get the man out of his mind. And he was by no means a nervous boy, he was mad on rugger just then . . ."

In other words, the Englishman is unemotional, at least relatively to the Russian. Not that he is altogether cold and unfeeling as they represent him on the continent. No, where important issues are involved, such as self-preservation or love, he is apt to display as much temperament as anyone else. But because he mistrusts his emotions they are *stiff* in him, unwilling to be roused, loath to stay for long at a high level of temperature; and so in ordinary life, as long as the deeper layers of his nature are not stirred up, he does indeed keep

his feelings stifled within himself (where they so often turn into inhibitions and complexes of all sorts).

I proposed to trace the effect of this emotional stiffness in various branches of life. It accounted, I thought, for the unmusicality of the English, since music more than any other art derives its material from the emotional fund; for the abnormal growth of what one might call Unreal Literature, the literature of nonsensical situations, purely verbal humour, etc., down to crossword puzzles; for the smooth steady working of the social and business apparatus of the nation; and finally, for the slow gestation of personal relationships, particularly the non-sexual ones. "Winter him and summer him and winter him again." How different that was from Russia, where time was of no account in relationships!

"Ten p.m. in a sleeping carriage of the Petersburg-Moscow express. Two young *Intelligentzia* people in the compartment with me: he a criminologist, she a doctor; they had never met before. At eleven I went up to the upper berth, but could not sleep and eavesdropped. They were talking about themselves. At midnight he was telling her the story of his unhappy love: a charming girl—betrothal and happiness—then a brave Captain—the cooling of the girl—good-bye. At one a.m. the woman doctor came forth with her story. She was going to the Caucasus to marry an engineer; he adored her, whilst she only liked him. 'Then you mustn't marry!' cried the criminologist in great indignation, 'for marriage without love is but a corpse.' She, with Tchekovian weariness: 'Ah, but you don't understand, it's all so complicated. You see, I'll never love anyone, not properly, not as one ought to love for marrying. And he's a very good man and would be heart-broken if I refused him, and my parents would be heart-broken too, for they've set their hearts upon our marriage.' He, inexorably: 'This is all irrelevant; the point is that you mustn't marry without love.' And so forth. At three a.m. he was begging her to get out of the train and return to Petersburg before it was too late."

My main problem concerned the origin of that English

unemotionality. Was it an inherent racial characteristic, or had it been acquired historically, through systematic cultivation (Puritanism, the public school ideal, etc.)? Here I found myself on insecure ground. The right way of approaching the problem was, of course, to go through the whole of the old literature, from Chaucer onwards, but that was too big an undertaking for which I had neither time nor courage. (I wish someone would do it, he would contribute a lot to national self-knowledge.) I had only my impression to go by: that in old times, in the Elizabethan epoch, for instance, the English had been much more "Russian," quicker with their sympathies and antagonisms, more willing to give themselves to a relationship, with emotions staying longer at a high level of temperature.

And then when my copy-book was filled with notes and quotations I lost faith in my subject. For it dawned on me that what I was analysing was not the species "Englishman," representative of the whole nation, but only a sub-species, that sub-species which I happened to know best: "Middle-class Englishman." Most of my conclusions were quite inapplicable to working-class people, for instance. They did not mistrust emotion and did not stifle it, they were as natural as the Russians, only more disciplined, and as easy of approach—both my wife and I knew that from personal experience. I began to suspect that the generic, classless Englishman I had in my mind was but an abstraction devoid of all real significance, like the Mammal or the Vertebrate. And what was the use of writing a whole book about an abstraction?

I put my notes away—some of them I used later in one of my novels—and decided to try my hand at short stories.

I began with the epic of the Russian colonisers on the War Committee. The story was all there, straight from the life, and even rounded off by the departure of two officers for Abyssinia. As soon as I came back from the office I would settle down in the dining-room and write late into the night. Preliminary draft—version one—version two—version three, and so on.



When the fifth version was done I showed it to Leslie, in whose literary taste I had confidence. We had known Leslie before, but he, it appeared, did not like Rodney and had therefore kept away from us all these years. My heart missed a beat when, after reading the manuscript, he said: "Good," and after a pause: "Definitely good." For I knew he was not given to overstatements.

He went through the manuscript, for it badly needed correction: my grammar was very shaky, and I had not yet found my style. He struck out, explained, and made me re-write whole passages.

I wrote a few more stories, and when he had polished them off, sent them to the agent's. I pinned no great hopes on them, I knew that short stories were not a selling proposition, so without losing time I sat down to write the novel which I had tried to write in Russian before: about Tavrov, Lydia and Katya.

It was then that Messrs. Grant gave me notice, three months' notice (which was rather decent of them). The oily Roumanian had done his work: the exotic depots were sold at one-twentieth of their cost ("owing to unfair competition," was the official formula we used), and half of the staff had to go. My sensations were mixed: I felt relieved, I felt frightened of the future, and at the same time I did not care. For I had something else to occupy my mind, a scene which I had just conceived for my novel, a wonderful scene which I thought was worthy of Dostoievsky himself: the hero meeting his double and discoursing with him on Ultimate Realities. "You only know the arithmetic of life," the Double would say, "and that's why you can't construct anything. For construction presupposes the knowledge of Differential Calculus . . ."

For two months I did not tell Nadya about my having received notice: we could not do anything about it anyhow, and I thought I might as well spare her sixty days of worry. When I told her, she was terribly upset, not so much at my dismissal as at my having kept it from her. "You had no right to hide it from me," she said. "I'm not a little girl, I'm

entitled to share your troubles, I must have confidence in you." And she made me promise never to hide anything important from her—a promise which had an unexpected repercussion several years later.

"What shall we do now?" she asked when this ethical matter was settled.

I shrugged my shoulders.

"Pray to God, I suppose," I said, and hurried downstairs to my manuscript, in which quite different and more profitable subjects were discussed. "Do you know what the devil is?" Potyomkin, Tavrov's saturnine friend was asking. "I'll tell you. They paint him with a tail and horns and an evil glare in his eye. But that's for the *plebs*, of course. As a matter of fact he's simply a curve. The line of least resistance. You know what a diagram of forces is? Well, the devil is just a curve on such a diagram. Take Christ's temptation in the desert. Had you been more of a mathematician I might reproduce that scene just by a few curves. And that's why people drink vodka: it's the line of least resistance, simpler and easier than bothering about things. . . . *Votre santé, mon cher.*"

A month later I was a free man once more. The publishing firm Elkin Mathews and Marrot accepted my short stories, but as I did not feel happy about them and my novel was almost ready, we agreed to wait until it was finished. And finished it soon was: the Russian version was sound on the whole, so that there was not much to do. My publisher wrote me a complimentary letter and sent me a cheque for £25. True to my method of self-insurance against eventual disappointment, I did not let myself indulge in rosy hopes, and damped Nadya's enthusiasm. She said I was a kill-joy, and I agreed.

The search for a title began. My original suggestion was *His Last Disciple*. Could I not improve on it? asked my publisher.

I could, although I failed to see why that was important. I suggested *Personal Relationships*.

Too heavy, he thought. What about *The Dark City*?

Petrograd, I retorted, was not dark at all. *Rectangular City* would be nearer the point.

Not bad, he opined. But perhaps I could go one better.

What about *The Gentle Gladiator*? I asked.

That, he thought, was a promising line. But why "gentle"? Could I not find another adjective?

He wrote to me, and I wrote to him, and in the end we were both tired of it. "Do what you like," I said, and as he could not find the ideal substitute for "gentle," he left out the adjective altogether, and the book was called *The Gladiator*—a bad title which satisfied neither of us.

Then we argued on the question of my name. He wanted me to keep my Russian name, his idea being to present me to the public as a kind of second Conrad. I wanted to adopt an English *nom de plume*: the public, I thought, would be prejudiced against a foreigner, or take my novel to be a translation. As I was only a novice in the literary game I ended by giving in. Which I still think was a mistake: I ought to have obeyed my instinct.

I went to London and saw my publisher. He was a slim, lean-faced young man with a narrow head, sharp eyes, jerky movements, frightfully quick speech, and a colossal vocabulary. He was emphatic in praise of my novel, and showed me his blurb in which he announced it as one of the best ever published by his firm. "As for sales," he said, his facial muscles working with extraordinary rapidity, "you'd better not count on financial success. In the present conditions of literary chaos it's entirely a matter of luck, damn!" (this referred to his upsetting a heap of books). "You may get recognition at once, and you may have to wait three, five or seven years for it." Which I simply did not believe. The public, I thought, might conceivably miss one good book, perhaps even two, but not five and not six—not if they were really good. I know better now, and I wish every publisher had Vincent's warning printed in extra large letters all over his office for the edification of naïve beginners.

A few minutes were enough for Vincent to make me feel at

home with him. He was intensely alive and affable, he had a quick bright intelligence and a concentrated awareness of his interlocutor, which reminded me of Russia. He enjoyed talking and could talk about anything, freely mixing serious observations with spurts of caustic humour in which hyperbole played a prominent part. He was musical, with strongly individual preferences, and his diatribe on Beethoven made me rock with laughter. "Oh, that everlasting Beethoven! he drives me dotty!" he spluttered, pressing his hands to his temples, creases of agony furrowing his forehead. "There's no getting away from Beethoven: whenever you switch on the wireless it's either the Fifth Symphony or the Seventh. especially the Seventh! My God, what a crashing bore it is! Do you remember that Allegretto: *Pom pom-pom-pom pom, pom pom-pom*. . . Great stuff! Work of genius! Bah! ninety-seven bars on the same note, and the whole thing repeated sixteen times with scarcely any alteration. How very original! . . . Don't you agree with me?"

I knew the Allegretto; to my mind it is one of the very highest peaks of music, but I was weak with laughter, so I could only say "No."

He blinked in surprise, the fierce glow left his face, which took on an expression of confusion. "No? really not?" he asked in surprise. "You don't think so? How very strange! I thought that as a Russian you would dislike these thick German soups . . ."

He lunched me at a smart restaurant. Apparently he was a gourmet: the *truite au bleu*, he found, was not cooked enough, and he only ate a tiny piece of it; something was wrong with the chicken, too, and the mushrooms were tougher than they ought to be ("They'd make first-rate goloshes"). We drank a bottle of champagne and talked, that is to say he did the talking, whilst I supplied an occasional interjection. After lunch he wanted me to accompany him to his office. "Let's walk," I proposed, for the weather was fine and the distance quite small. But the idea shocked him. "Walk?" he echoed, as though I had suggested something obscene. "Why walk if we can have a taxi?" He hailed one that was passing. "Now,

you said just now you didn't like Brahms. But have you ever heard the Piano Quintet? . . ."

At his office he answered telephone calls, gave rapid instructions to his assistants, searched for a manuscript and failed to find it ("The damned things move about on their own!") and talked about Russia, motor cars, Promenade Concerts, and many other things. After tea he decided to call it a day and took me to his house at Wimbledon, where a picnic was organised—that is to say, we sat in the garden amidst an accumulation of dogs, decanters, deck-chairs, parasols, boxes of cigarettes, and books, with one wireless roaring from the summer-house and another from the window of the nursery upstairs. At dinner he treated me to some excellent hock, and when we got up I was not quite steady on my legs. "It's good for you," he said with solicitude, and proposed that I should stay the night, which, however, could not be done, since I had a half-time job with a firm of soap manufacturers in Newcastle and had to be there the following morning. I wondered whether all publishers were like him, and I knew I had acquired a friend.

Back in Newcastle I started on my next novel. It proved more difficult than the first, partly because I had no material prepared for it, and partly because of my financial worries. For my income had shrunk to some ten pounds a month, and my capital to sixty pounds. I looked for work, but had no hopes of finding any.

The vicissitudes of my career had taught us how to cut our budget, and by now we had brought down our expenses to a minimum. Nadya dressed herself and the children by the method of Permutations and Combinations, remaking and turning old things; somehow she managed to look more elegant than all the Newcastle bourgeois. I wore my suits till they shone like polished steel, and then, throwing pride to the winds, began to wear other people's suits. We had not been to the country for two years, and our amusement item—cinemas—did not exceed one pound per annum. But all these economies proved hopelessly inadequate. What was to

be done? Should we leave the big house and move to the slums? That would have saved us some forty pounds, but then we got as much for letting two rooms; besides, writing does require a certain quiet, and what quiet can you get in a poky house with two healthy, noisy children stamping about? Should we move the children to a County school? But that only meant saving thirty pounds, and thirty pounds did not solve our problem. As for food, we only had one meal a day anyhow, and to pass to the Margarine Régime was, we decided, the very last thing to do.

For the information of those who have no experience in that line, poverty begins long before the level of physical privation has been reached. For in a civilised country it is not enough to have a roof over your head and be properly fed. Your wife may be a genius with the needle, but she cannot sew shoes or school-books or make a child's frock out of the air. You have to buy a new dish to replace the one that has cracked, and mend the window-pane your daughter has smashed, and send for the plumber when your bath refuses to work, and buy some linen when your sheets have fallen to pieces. You must have umbrellas and overcoats to defend yourself against the ever-blowing winds and the thirty-odd inches of water accumulated in the grey northern sky; you have to go to the dentist's now and again, and even if you do without a doctor, you have to buy medicine when someone falls ill. These invisible items amount to quite a lot, more than one might think. Roughly speaking, the minimum for a black-coated man with a medium-sized family in the provinces is £200, made up of, say, £130 for prime necessities and £70 for . . . for being black-coated. On this level he can exist, just exist, without being able to afford anything whatsoever that might relieve the dreariness of mere existence either to-day or to-morrow or next week. What that means moneyed people have no idea. They see a house in which shabbiness is mitigated by taste; they see two vivacious, normally clean children, and a hostess who is a lady; but they do not see the disproportionate amount of drudgery that goes to keeping up this appearance of gentility, they do not see the countless patches and seams

and holes, or the alarming emptiness of cupboards and drawers; and so they conclude that things can't be so bad after all, not qualitatively different from their own position. In Newcastle they used to call on Nadya and complain of being tired, oh, so tired! after playing tennis and shopping. With a deep sigh they would tell her how hard up they were, and then in the course of the conversation it would transpire that they were getting ready for a trip to Mallorca or buying a new car. They would talk about the theatre, urge Nadya to go and see *The Eleventh Hour*, and ask naïvely: "Why no?" when she said she never went to the theatre. "They don't understand," she would say after they had gone. "They never understand," says Mme Kurcheninov with an apologetic smile. "They—cannot—understand——" says Blanch, a charming artist and a splendid fighter, angrily hitting the table, her lovely eyes bright with conviction. "It's no use explaining to them, they do—not—want—to—see."

*The Gladiator* was published late in the autumn of 1930. The press hardly noticed it. Some provincial papers said nice things about it; one London critic praised the translation; another one called the novel "quite a good comedy." His only quotation was from page twenty-nine; not having read beyond that, he could not know that the rest was not comedy at all. The book sold 800 copies, that is to say, I just earned my advance. My remuneration, I calculated, was at the rate of fourpence an hour.

Why was that? I wondered. For by then I knew, less from inner evidence than from what I was told by some intelligent readers, that I had written a good novel, much above the average. Was it the "—sky" of my name that had done the harm? Or did my publisher not know his business? Or, as Leslie had warned me, the critics and the public were antagonised by the intellectual stuff of which there was quite a lot in the book? "You aren't supposed to think in a novel, you know," Leslie had said.

I know now that to guess at the reason for the failure of a book, any one book in particular, is as futile as to speculate on

why skirts became shorter (or is it longer?) in 1931. There is no Why in these things: causality does not operate in the worlds of fashion and fiction. A model or a book takes on not because it is "good," but because people like it. Why they like it no one knows—not they themselves could tell you. Quality, however one interprets the word, has nothing to do with it. Nor have reviews. Nor advertising. Nor the subject. The success of a book appears to be the resultant of Time and Chance, so that any book stands a chance, just a chance, of selling well, and any author, if he perseveres for five, ten or fifteen years, is likely to score a hit. But I did not know that at the time, I had not taken in Vincent's warning; I only knew that *The Gladiator* was better and more genuine than most novels, and yet people would not have it.

For the first time in my life I had to borrow money. It was very humiliating—quite a different proposition from accepting suits, overcoats, etc.—even though I knew it was not my fault, even though my friends were terribly nice about it. This feeling of humiliation, as I saw later on, came not from my pride, and not from having to declare myself bankrupt, but from that feeling of ostracism which grows out of unemployment. I was not wanted anywhere; the community had no room for me: first, Commerce had thrown me out, and now Literature was refusing me admission.

The loan, of course, did not solve anything. Nadya could at last buy a new pair of shoes, but in a few months I should be back where I was. The second novel I had begun would be published in the autumn; I should get another £25 advance, and probably nothing more. The foreign trade in soap was going down: there were fewer translations, and I only earned some seven pounds a month.

Nadya's resistance broke down—and no wonder. All through these years she had been living on her spiritual reserves, by the sheer strength of determination, which, in turn, had fed on a belief in better times to come. As this belief waned, her health gave in, she started upon a series of illnesses. Not wishing to acknowledge defeat, she would get



up too early, attack the neglected housework, and fall ill again. Now it was influenza, now a relapse of her old spine trouble, now an abscess in the ear—a trifle the size of a pinhead but as painful, she said, as childbirth. It was a case of being generally run down. She ailed the whole winter, her spirits were sinking, depression was getting hold of her.\*

I could not cheer her up; my worry for her had exhausted my own reserves. Despondency swamped my mind. I came to hate the sunshine and the blue sky, the symbols of ease and pleasures that were for others, not for us. I hid from the day in the sunless dining-room and wrote, wrote, wrote, doping myself with work. I only found rest in bed after the light had been put out: I felt then that for a few hours I had escaped from reality, and Nadya was safe from her drudgery, from her sisters' heart-rending letters, from new disappointments.

Then insomnia began, and that was awful. Night after night it was the same: an hour after I had fallen asleep I would suddenly find myself wide awake, and lie for hours in a state of ever-growing tension, my body heavy with fatigue, my nerves taut, cheerless thoughts, always the same thoughts, turning round and round in my brain—thoughts about my having failed Nadya, and my utter helplessness to stem the run of bad luck or whatever it was. I would sit up and smoke one cigarette after another till my head swam; then, drugged, I would lie down—and it began all over again, the cinema of the brain unrolling the same tedious film, the muscles cramped with futile tension, the terror of life squeezing the heart with icy fingers. Sleep, a long moment of non-being, and a reluctant awakening, lead in the limbs, a buzzing head, a disgust for the coming day, disgust for the very act of living.

Mukalov, the man of iron, had bent under insomnia. I was breaking under it. Everything pertaining to domestic matters irritated me; at the slightest provocation I snapped and shouted at the children and Nadya. Her self-control was also giving way, and quarrels sprang between us more and more often, quarrels over the children, with whom I thought she

\* Another misfortune, a serious one, befell us that year, but I have not the right to speak of this.

was not firm enough; over the—to my mind—unnecessary work she was doing; over the thick letters from Tunis; over Memento Mori, a very old woman whom Nadya fed up in the kitchen and the sight of whom gave me the creeps because she reminded me of the nether strata of poverty to which we too might sink in a year or five years. If there was no reason for quarrel we would create one by reading some wounding sense into each other's words. When I grumbled about some bill, Nadya suspected me of blaming her for inefficient house-keeping; when she complained of my smoking the whole day long in the dining-room I would flare up because her remark made me think of my wasting fifteen shillings a month on a stupid habit which I could not overcome. One day we had a first-class row over a jumper which she was knitting for Mrs. Y., a woman who lived close by and spent half of her time in watching the street from behind the lace curtain in her drawing-room, and the other half in spreading gossip about people. That Nadya, overworked as she was, should sweat for that spider-woman! "Leave the jumper," I said. She said she would not: "I have begun and I must finish it." No, you shan't. Yes, I shall. And so on, until she went upstairs, to have a cry in the unheated bedroom and I in rage and misery rushed to the dining-room to my manuscript.

We were drifting apart. Often in her presence I became aware of a mute force that was pulling me away from her, through whom so much anguish had come into my life, who was the focus and the sensitive centre of my defeat; and when looking into her eyes I often thought I noticed the same force working in her. We tried to counteract our estrangement, and we did overcome it—so long as the effort lasted; but as soon as it relaxed, we again felt the distance grow between us. We had come to associate our relationship with our misfortunes; we became to each other the embodiment of our worries and our weariness.

In the small hours of the night I often thought of suicide, not dramatically, *con fuoco*, as I had done once or twice in my youth, but with a persistent, even longing, as one visualises freedom from a prison cell. I was not ashamed of these

thoughts, and I am not ashamed now, for they reflect my fundamental attitude to life. Man's life, as I see it, is not the absolute, and not even the supreme value; it only acquires value through what its holder does with it. If he cannot do anything, if it is reduced to a mechanical subsistence, life becomes valueless, a mere instinct, which we usually obey because it is very strong in us, but which we need not respect and may oppose if we choose to. . . . But there was Nadya, and whatever might be my ideas on this subject, I could not leave her in the lurch—not because she was my wife, but because I loved her. One night I suggested double suicide to her (I had a revolver then). To my surprise she was not shocked at the idea. She kept silent for a long time, then she said: "No, I can't. What will happen to the children?" I argued with her, but only half-heartedly, for I realised that the children had the same hold on her as she had on me, and for the same reason.

I learned what envy was. Not the ordinary coveting of things one has not got, but the bitter, shameless and shame-faced envy which turns against the owner of those things and becomes hostility. By what right did all these hare-brained, subhuman bourgeois who pullulated in the better quarters of Newcastle and hundreds of other towns, possess more than they needed, more than was good for them, often more than they could cope with, whilst others—that is to say myself—had not enough to exist on? Why was it that I, one of the most intelligent men in the town, capable of working seventy hours a week, could not afford to give my wife a week's holiday from her ceaseless drudgery, when their vulgar females, tired of excessive leisure and gossiping, went to the Riviera and Scotland? And what was the sense and the value of a régime in which man's economic security depended as little on his brain and capacity for work as on the rainfall in Nigeria? The value was nil. If society were organised on the principle of physical height, so that the tallest men were the masters and the undersized ones the slaves, such organisation would not be any sillier or more unfair than the existing system.

Everybody realised that—everybody from H. G. Wells down to the last bargee; it was repeated in thousands of books and millions of speeches, and yet the régime stood as strong as ever. Why was that? Because in spite of so-called Democracy, all power was still with Money, that invisible impersonal entity which ruled over all Parliaments and parties, Committees and Councils, distorted the minds of men by means of education, cinemas and the Press, and bullied the discontented masses into submission by appealing to a peace not worth preserving, and by evoking visions of apocalyptic disasters which would follow any attempt at reconstructing society on a rational basis. And since never, in any circumstances, would Money voluntarily abdicate its power, since in no country had Parliament, whatever the proportion of the parties, ever been able to overthrow that invisible power, reconstruction would have to come from outside Parliament, from the millions of the moneyless—as happened in Russia.

Thus it was only now, some five years after my attempt to join the Bolsheviks, that I became a Communist—after my own fashion. I did not read Karl Marx, for I could not believe that the New Society would be built according to a plan drafted sixty years ago, however bearded and dogmatic its author (in Russia it certainly was not). I had no intention of joining the Communist Party or attending Socialist meetings, or even of trying to bring other people round to my way of thinking. Nor did I approach the Bolsheviks again. For by now I knew that I did not suit them: I had not the makings of a fanatic in me, and with my critical attitude of mind, my intellectual impatience, and my inability to pretend, I should, if I went to Russia, promptly find myself feeding the arctic mosquitoes.

Now the bourgeois régime may be an abomination, but—and this is the tragedy of all rebel thinkers—the negative emotions of bitterness, envy and hostility engendered by the revolutionary attitude have a disruptive effect on man's mind. Not that they are "wrong" in themselves, morally or metaphysically: they are just as much needed for the evolution of mankind as the positive emotions of sympathy and acquies-

cence. But it is a psychological fact that the feeling of unity with the herd adds to man's mental health, whereas isolation from the herd tends to produce a morbid self-consciousness. That was what happened to me. I began to shrink from people, all people indiscriminately, as though I were afraid of their noticing the disharmonious state of my mind. I even avoided Leslie; I avoided him more indeed than the rest; and yet curiously enough I felt no hostility to him on account of his being well-off; he was a cultured and intelligent man, and that was some kind of justification.

In the autumn of 1931 my second book came out, *The Greatest of These*. This time the London Press noticed me and said nice things about the novel. The heroine, wrote Winifred Holtby, was "one of the loveliest women in English fiction"—small wonder, considering that I had portrayed Nadya. I felt pleased, but no more than that, for I had become a realist: I waited for the sales figure. It was 800—exactly the same as in the case of *The Gladiator*. I had failed once more.

I went to see Elsa. She was an excellent woman, she had a brain and had seen life—real, grim life. I told her about the state of discord in which I lived and asked her to help me to see my own case from outside.

"I'm blaming everybody and everything," I said. "But perhaps the fault is mine. There may be something wrong with me of which I'm not aware, but others see it, and that's why they don't give me work and don't read my books."

"You shouldn't put it like that," said Elsa. "It isn't a question of you or anybody being wrong. Simply you've had the bad luck of getting into an utterly uncongenial environment, and being intolerant—for you are that, aren't you?"

"I am."

"Being intolerant, you can't accept that environment. And don't try to, you'll never manage it. It would mean your changing yourself, and that is an impossible thing."

"But I must do something, I can't go on living like this. Endure? But I see no virtue in enduring. Why, every worm is

more enduring than Jesus Christ! I feel I'm getting thoroughly demoralised, and I don't want that."

"Naturally. . . . What are your chances of finding work in London?"

"About the same as here: nil. . . . The trouble is that for those who have no money at all, there is no way out."

"I think you are unduly pessimistic. I can't give you any practical advice, of course; all I can say is that you mustn't blame yourself. Go on thinking and writing as you've done so far, and try to look at the whole thing as an experience."

"An experience? No, I can't look at it that way. A certain amount of strain is good for a man, it keeps him brisk. But there is a point beyond which it becomes destructive, and I've reached that point. And Nadya has too."

"You are exaggerating. You aren't as weak as you make it out. As for Nadya, she's amazingly strong, I mean in the sense of vitality."

"She is, but all the same she's beginning to give in. And anyhow what's the use of that experience to her? She's gone through all that before, she's had quite enough pain, and has nothing to learn from that teacher. He'll only stun her if he keeps at her. She's good enough as she is, too good in fact, considering what people are like in general. And I hate to think of her being stunned in order that in some heavenly dimension another triumph of high morals may be registered. That's a Christian idea which is abhorrent to me."

"You misunderstand me," said Elsa. "I don't mean moral perfection at all. I mean that the experience you're having now will give you—and Nadya too—something which you yourself will acknowledge as valuable later on. What it'll be I can't tell, but it'll be something worth the trouble. Well, then, try and extract this value from your experience."

"There may be no value in it."

"There always is, but as a rule we only see it in retrospect, long after the experience is over. And the harder the experience the bigger its value; or rather, the more value can be extracted from it."

Then we talked about other matters, and I left. Apart from my relief at having unburdened my heart to a good friend, our conversation left me unsatisfied. Yet it did its work—slowly, as always happens when important issues are involved.

One result was a positive feeling which I might call spiritual self-assurance. I realised that these years, which I thought had been wasted, had developed in me a particular kind of understanding, the same kind which I had always valued in the few people who possessed it, and which I had always placed high above the intelligence of the brain and the responsiveness of the heart: a sense of life's essentials, a capacity for discriminating between the important and unimportant, the genuine and the bogus, in people and thought and even literature (in so far as it reflected life). One could not get that understanding out of books, or borrow it, or drag it out of oneself at will; the only means of acquiring it was to live through so many thousand hours of strain and struggle and gnashing of teeth, worry for oneself and especially for others, near and far. It was not a marketable value—I could not put it to any practical use; it was not a communicable value, for one could not formulate it; and it was not fashionable—there was no demand for it, or infinitely less demand than there was for, say, the journalistic nimbleness of mind, or for quick, superficial wit. But, on the other hand, it bore its reward within itself; it gave me a firm basis for my judgment and also the feeling of my fundamental superiority to those who led quiet normal lives. They might know a lot about things, books, and events, but I was richer than they in the ultimate knowledge, most difficult of all: whilst they only saw the body of life and perhaps the nerves of life, I knew something about its very soul.

The second result of my talk with Elsa was that I broke with Newcastle. Friends helped me with money; I took a few pounds, left the rest with Nadya, gave my revolver, my only decent possession, to Leslie, who had been a staunch friend to us in those difficult years, and went to London.

"You're unfair to Newcastle," says Nadya. "After all, we

did have some nice people there, and a lot of fun, too—drives, concerts, and things like that.”

Yes, we did. But these nice people were hers rather than mine, I had very little in common with them; whilst Elsa and Leslie who meant much to me were for various reasons almost unobtainable. As for “fun,” one can only in retrospect set it off against such big things as all-round failure and unemployment. At the time, neither of us could do it. For—and herein lies the fundamental, pathetic inadequacy of pleasure so vividly demonstrated by thousands and thousands of rich men—it does not affect the state of dejection at all, but only breaks it up for so many hours at a time—just as, in the case of an invalid, morphia does not weaken the intensity of his pain, but merely produces some gaps in it: the pain remains exactly the same as it was. To weaken or overcome pain itself, be it mental or physical, quite different means, much subtler than pleasure or sleep, are required.

Anyhow, I still shudder when I think of Newcastle.

In London I took a tiny room, so tiny that even in January the gas stove heated it in five minutes, and lived on what I earned by reading foreign books for publishers and giving occasional Russian lessons (I am sorry to say that was not enough, and I had to borrow a little from Nadya now and again). I experimented with food, and found one could bring down that item as low as 28s. a month (semolina, milk, bread, butter and coffee). It was quite easy: after a week or so one ceased to long for better food; and yet had Nadya been doing the same thing I should have been eating my heart out with worry. One may be an egoist—if that word has any meaning, which it has not—and yet find it more difficult to bear other people's troubles than one's own.

I wrote my third novel. The work progressed badly, for after all I was rather spoiled and did feel the discomfort of my new conditions, so the book was only finished in the summer. Vincent declared himself very satisfied with it: it was light, with plenty of humour (good humour, too), and he felt certain it would sell. In a fit of optimism which was



really a camouflage for his wish to help me, he fixed a generous subsidy for me on account of my prospective royalties, whereupon I made my family move to London. I do not know to this day whether it was the right thing to do or not: on the one hand, they could live considerably cheaper in Newcastle; on the other, I felt I should not be able to write another book living all by myself *and* on semolina. That is just the beastly thing about poverty, that whatever you undertake is wrong, and yet you must do something or you will never get off the dead point.

In the autumn my family came to London, and we took a house. The novel—Vincent had found the ideal title for it: *Foreign Bodies*—achieved a definite *succès d'estime*. J. C. Squire wrote a glowing review with many enthusiastic adjectives, and since he was one of the critics whom I believed to possess both sincerity and a sense of value, I felt highly flattered. When I met him he said it must sell well: 10,000 copies was his estimate. Mary Leonard, the American agent, famous for her unfailing flair for books, swore that I would find no difficulty in placing it in America. They both proved wrong: no American firm would touch it, and in England it sold just as badly as its predecessors: 800 copies.

My financial position was worse than ever, what with a steadily increasing amount of debts, no prospect of work, and the imminent end of Vincent's subsidy (he was winding up his business). By all the rules I ought to have plunged into the depths of despondency. But I did not. London kept me braced up. I loved the town, I felt at home in it, and I had friends: Elsa had moved to Kensington, Vincent was only half an hour's journey from me, Mme Kurcheninov was in Hampstead. I had neither time nor money to see them often, but the important thing was to know they were there, within my reach, and that if I wanted to I could find other congenial people. That made all the difference. Just as poverty depresses you, not because you cannot afford this or that particular thing, but because you cannot afford anything at all, either to-day or to-morrow or ever, so with personal relationships: you feel lonely, not when you do not see people,

but when you cannot see them, as had been my case in Newcastle.

Nadya and I went to a cocktail party, our first. It was a successful party—that is to say, two rooms meant to contain a dozen people contained seventy. I conversed with a long-toothed novelist: he talked about Pilots, I about Pirates, but because of the terrible din we only discovered the discrepancy at the very end. I spilt some sherry on a woman's frock, but decided not to apologise since she had not noticed it. The peppery biscuit served with the sherry was abominable. As someone had taken my umbrella I took somebody else's, a much better one. The rattling, clanging train of the Metropolitan Railway seemed a haven of repose after the hubbub of the room. "This is the modern conception of Personal Relationships," I said to Nadya. She was rubbing her eyes, which were still smarting from the smoke of seventy simultaneous cigarettes. "Do they really enjoy that sort of thing?" she asked.

Do they?

I started on my fourth novel. It was to be largely autobiographical, and to deal with my life in Newcastle and the episode of Rodney. Nadya objected energetically, indignantly. Why drag it all up? Was I not ashamed of undressing myself in front of others? And had I the right to disclose an intimate relationship to the public?

My answer was that I had to have Newcastle out of my system. I had to understand what it had done to me, and I am so inarticulate that I can only achieve final clarity of thought when I have put it down on paper and revised six times or so. As for the public, I did not mind whether they recognised me in the hero of the book or not. I had chosen a theme, or rather the theme had chosen me, and the fact that the hero was myself was accidental: I intended to treat myself exactly as though I were somebody else.

With regard to Rodney, my intention was more vulnerable. Friendship is indeed an intimate thing, sheltered by tacit agreement from publicity, and in writing about him, even if

I were to disguise him, I should be breaking that agreement. It was on this point that Nadya concentrated her attacks. In all these years, she said, we had not breathed a word about Rodney to anyone, and now I was going to spoil it all !

I pleaded guilty to the charge of indiscretion—guilty but with extenuating circumstances. No matter how reticent one is, things do get known in a town like Newcastle; some people knew the story of our pathetic relationship, and my deliberately distorted record of it would add nothing to their knowledge. Conceivably a few more might guess the identity of Rodney. Well, I did not see much harm in that. I did not propose to blacken him; my idea was to present him as essentially a very nice young man, with only this defect: that he was not strong enough to withstand that peculiar mentality of indifference which seems always to grow out of wealth and is most exasperating in a crisis of relationship.

"Everybody will say you aren't a gentleman," said Nadya.

"I'm sure they will," I agreed. "And what's more, they'll be right. I'm not a gentleman, and not a nobleman either. I do what I think right without consulting other people's codes. Let them call me what they like—I don't care two hoots." A speech which I could not possibly have made a year earlier in Newcastle.

I spent eight months at the dining-table (very bad for rheumatism!) writing my novel about Newcastle, the one that was published under the title of *Its Silly Face*. This was my fourth book and proved just as difficult to write as any of the first three. Most novelists train themselves as they go on writing: every new book comes to them more easily than its predecessor. With me there is no progress, no acceleration: I always write equally slowly and with the same enormous expenditure of energy. As appears from a private *enquête* which I have made, with most novelists a printed page represents one and a half to two hours' work, counting only the time they actually spend in front of their manuscripts; in other words, a novel of average length takes them five to six hundred hours to write. My speed is—and always will be—

five to six hours a page; that is to say, a novel means in my case six or seven complete versions and some 1600 hours' work. The fact that I write in a foreign language does not account for this disgusting slowness; my speed would be only slightly higher if I wrote in Russian. When feeling discouraged by these computations I make myself think of Tolstoy, who rewrote the whole *Anna Karenina* nine times—by hand, if you please, for typewriters did not exist then (which means anything from nine hours a page upwards); and of Flaubert, who must have been twice as slow as Tolstoy. Unfortunately they are both far too big men to compare with myself in any respect.

In August my wife went once more to Tunis to see her people. I had finished my novel and felt I deserved a holiday. First I stayed with some friends in Sussex, but they could not have me indefinitely, and as the idea of returning to London seemed loathsome to me, I wired to George Travers, although I only knew him slightly, asking him whether he could have me. He said Yes.

## THE CRISIS

IT so happens that the best way of concealing the identity of people I am going to write about is to stick fairly closely to the truth. Two months before my holiday, in June, George Travers, an Anglo-American, and Miriam Brancken, his sister, married to an American, called on me with a present from Lydia, an embossed document-case in the Mexican style (they had been in Mexico and had met Lydia there). I liked Travers and thought his sister dull: apart from wide-set dreamy eyes and beautiful black hair—she had Southern blood in her—there was nothing worth noticing about her. After a long interval I called on Travers; he made me drunk on an excellent hock—one bottle does it easily—and suggested that I should come and stay at his place in, let us say, Oxfordshire.

Now, writing about Newcastle had taken a lot out of me, since the subject was still fresh and painful. The result of it was that I got insomnia. It was an oddly pleasant insomnia accompanied by a heightened receptivity which painted everything in bright colours and kept me in high spirits. And so at Eppswich—the fictitious name of Travers' country house—I felt happy and young, as happy and young as I had not been since my German days. I had got rid of my Newcastle complex, I knew I had written a good book, and for once I need not worry about Nadya, who was two thousand miles away.

Travers had a passion for gardening, which bores me, so that I hardly saw him and spent most of the time with Miriam. The first day I found her mildly boring, the second less so, on the third we became friends—a most unusual thing for me, who hardly ever change my first impression—and on the afternoon of the fourth panic seized me. I went for a long walk and did ten miles at full speed. But it did not help. After dinner, when Travers stretched out on the sofa, I slipped out into the park and perambulated there trying to collect

my wits. How had it happened? How could it happen? I asked myself, and found no answer. When Miriam's silhouette appeared on the veranda I knew that at all costs I must keep away from her, but instead I went towards her—my legs carried me of their own volition.

"Fine night," I said as I reached the veranda.

"Yes, isn't it?"

She sat in a wicker chair; I stood at the railing and smoked. We tried to talk about trivialities, but it was not a success. In the end I blurted out that I must go back to London to-morrow.

"To-morrow?" she echoed. "I thought you were staying a whole week. Your wife isn't coming back for four days yet, is she?"

"No, but I must go all the same."

"Why?"

I did not know what to answer, and again she asked, in a different, lower voice: "Why must you?"

This was my last chance of leaving unsaid what had better remain unsaid, but I could not avail myself of it. With a feeling of sliding down into an abyss I, or rather someone else in me whom I did not know, answered: "You know why."

For some time she kept silent, then, in her usual dreamy, wondering tone of voice, she said: "So there we are."

It took me some time to realise the implication of that little word "we." When I did, the sliding feeling grew so strong that I felt giddy.

"I knew this would happen," she continued in the same dreamy voice. "I knew it from the very beginning."

"From the beginning? Do you mean to say when you called on us for the first time?"

"Yes."

"But that's impossible! I felt nothing then, and I thought you . . ."

"Dull and stupid," she finished for me, a smile sounding in her voice.

"Dull, anyway," I confessed. "And snobbish."

"Yes, but all the same I knew then, I can't tell you how.

When your wire came I wanted to ask George to put you off altogether, but I couldn't think of a good reason, so I did nothing about it."

It was unbelievable, and yet I knew she was speaking the truth: she was incapable of inventing, she was far too sober-minded and modest for that.

"I'm frightened," I said.

"So am I," she said quickly. "We are in for trouble. . . . I suppose you know I love John?" (John was her husband, he was due in a week's time.)

"I thought you did. And I love my wife. So we're in the same boat." I laughed. "How absurd! If someone had predicted yesterday that this would happen I'd have called him a bloody fool."

The edge of the moon appeared from behind the black, pinioned spine of the Chilterns, a narrow line which grew into a sector. It widened and rose with dreamy slowness, higher and higher, till the full orb detached itself from the skyline and hung suspended in the dark vacuum, unreal, fantastic, its pale luminosity transforming the world into a fairy tale. We hardly spoke: all words were equally inadequate to the double mystery of the hour.

Then George came to the veranda, breaking through the gossamer fabric of the enchantment with his heavy footsteps, the movements of his big body, the sound of his loud, coarse voice. He talked about a gap he proposed to cut in the hedge beyond the birch-trees—how could he bother about a hedge?—and getting no response, yawned and declared that he was going to bed. Miriam rose.

"I think I'll go too," she said. "Good night."

"Good night." I was glad she did not stay, I wanted to be alone.

That night I went mad, raving mad. The dawn found me in the woods waving a heavy cudgel and singing at the top of my voice. A farmer with a dog appeared in the distance, and at first shyness made me shut up and swerve into the bushes, but the next moment I came out and challengingly, brazen-facedly intoned Wotan's *Abschied*. I sang better than I had

ever sung in my life, perhaps because it was my last song.

Of course I did not leave that day, nor the following, nor the day after that. We walked in the fields and the woods, I sat with her by the brook, and the look in her eyes transformed everything around me into a glorious miracle of light and happiness. At night the darkness was alive with her, and when I shut my eyes and buried my head in the pillow, I found her within me, a radiant presence, a wild whirl, a rush of immaterial flame, which seared and burned every atom of body and soul in me, till nothing was left of the man I was and another one emerged whom I did not know. Hours passed, and, exhausted by the pounding of my heart, shattered by the terrific tension of life within me, I cried and begged a non-existent God to relieve the unbearable strain, to return me to the ordinary comprehensible dimensions. . . . I had been in love before, but I had never experienced anything like this inhuman fury of the senses—perhaps because I had grown up and there was more to burn in me.

Now and again I remembered Nadya, and much to my surprise the thought of her evoked no scruples and aroused no problems in me. Nadya was Nadya; I loved her and would go on loving her as before. The law of mechanics which allows only one object to fill its own space does not apply to the human soul, in which two loves, three loves, any amount of loves, can co-exist, because they are on different planes and only intersect each other at one point: man's consciousness. Sometimes a voice said in me: "This is wrong," but I knew then, as I know now, that that was not the voice of conscience, and not my voice at all, but merely an echo of the suggestion coming from other people who condemn double love because of the practical complications it leads to. But why should there be any complications? All I had to do was not to tell Nadya, for, of course, being a woman, she was biologically incapable of understanding plural feeling. Even so, whispered the voice, it's safer to leave before things have gone any further. Yes, it may have been safer, but it was impossible, as impossible as for a man falling into an abyss to arrest his fall by clutching



at the air. There was nothing in me or around me to clutch at, no point that could offer any resistance.

Four days passed in this state of madness. On the morning of the fifth day, on which I was due to leave, I held her in my arms and kissed her. The idyll was over, the grim force of desire had entered into play.

"You'll be mine," I said. "You'll have to, there is no other way left for us."

And she said: "Perhaps I will. But don't hurry me. I'm slow in these matters—much slower than you are." Words which I took lightly at the time.

In London a double life began for me. On one plane there was my ordinary existence with Nadya, my friends, my work at a literary agency in which I had a tiny job (it soon ended). On that plane everything was solid, familiar, comprehensible. The other was a continuous non-dimensional delirium outside the categories of space and time, an irrational state in which happiness was identical with torment, desire with self-abnegation, reality with imagination. My insomnia continued: I slept only a couple of hours a night, but felt none the worse for it.

Hundreds of times I asked myself: How could it have happened? She was neither beautiful nor interesting—a plain woman with dreamy wide-set eyes and wonderful hair. She had a certain amount of that intuitive mental sympathy which in women stands for intelligence, but not much of it. Probably she was not a kind woman. What her interests were I did not know, she seemed to have none apart from ballet (which I cannot bear). We had nothing in common; when I tried to imagine long evenings with her I could not think how we would fill them in. But all this did not alter the main fact: that I wanted her with a strength such as I had never experienced before, such as made all thought of resistance ludicrous. Why did I want her? There was no answer to that. These things simply happened: they came, banged you on the head, and said: That's why.

Three times I went to Eppswich to meet her clandestinely

†

in the woods. It was a romantic but not a satisfactory arrangement, for her husband had arrived from the New World, and they were socially busy, calling on people, having people to stay with them, expecting people to tea. When she expected no one she was afraid her husband might suspect her if she stayed out too long. "Forget about him," I begged, "I see so little of you." But she never gave in. "In three minutes I'll have to go," she would say, and in exactly three minutes go she would. When I pressed or reproached her, she grew impatient: "Why do you make things more difficult for me?" Nor would she let me come more often. "We mustn't both lose our heads," she said once. I could not make her out. She loved me, or so she said; how, then, could she be so calculating? Strength of character? I doubted it: one cannot be strong against one's love. No, it looked suspiciously like coolness.

In October she and her husband moved to Hampstead. Their plans were uncertain, they vaguely thought of returning to the New World in the winter, and therefore did not take a house but settled in George's. Now only a few miles divided us, and there would be, I thought, no difficulty in our seeing each other. Ways and means would be found to meet in safety; she had mentioned a flat that belonged to a friend of hers, an American actress who was away; or I might take a *garçonnière*.

This was the first time I experienced an inner conflict. A *garçonnière* meant money, and even two pounds a week was a colossal sum for a pauper like myself, a sum which I had no right to spend. The case was clear, it admitted of no quibbling. But it was equally clear that I had to have the woman as I had to have oxygen for my lungs. If she told me to go with her to the New World or to Peking, I would go; if she wanted us to marry, I would marry her. And yet at the same time I loved Nadya, I loved her even more than before; I would have given up anything for her—anything except that other woman whom I could not give up just as I could not stop breathing, whom I had to see and covet and possess, no matter how much misery I were to inflict on myself, on her

and on Nadya. Of course I would pay for that misery and pay heavily; perhaps my life would be smashed—very well then, let it be smashed: I could not do the impossible, I could not lift myself by the scruff of my neck, however hard I tried.

But Miriam would not hear of a *garçonnière*. She did not like the idea; we must wait, she said, something would surely turn up. Nor would she meet me more often, partly because of her many engagements, and partly because, as she put it, one of us at least must keep his head clear. So I saw her only once a week, for a couple of hours, now in some park and now in a café (“Don’t stare at me like that, the waitress is watching you”). Neither then nor later did anyone whom we knew see us together—and that is why I can write so freely about her.

Anyhow, after a month I could not stand this starvation régime any longer, and decided to force the pace. A friend of mine, an artist, let me use his flat in Chelsea, and one afternoon I succeeded in bringing Miriam there. We had tea and kissed. This time desire had the better of her: she did lose her head, and offered herself to me. But the October sun was flooding the room with bright light; the sofa had no linen on it, and, worst of all, the clock showed ten past six. Now at half-past six she had to leave the flat to meet her husband at some station—they were going away for the weekend. I knew that whatever happened she would go at that hour, and to me it made all the difference. Other people in my place would not have minded any of these obstacles (the heroes of yellow French novels, for instance, do not mind a taxi or a bench in the park), but I am not made that way. I can only take in music if it is played properly, and I would much rather not hear it at all than hear it played hurriedly and carelessly. And so history repeated itself: our meeting ended as chastely as those I had had with Zoya. Miriam was not hurt and did not bear me any grudge, as some modern-minded male readers might expect; on the contrary, I know she was grateful to me for having saved her—yes, that is the right word—from an ugly episode.

But I now knew that her resistance was broken, and I

started looking for a *garçonne*. At the same time I did the cruellest thing I have ever done in my life.

So long as my love for Miriam was platonic, it did not interfere with my relationship with Nadya: if anything, I was a better husband than before, gentler, more considerate, less short-tempered. Now, however, that Miriam was virtually mine, I became aware of a contradiction and a lie. There was nothing wrong with my loving two women, but I could not be a husband to both of them without sullyng either. It was not reasoning, and not morals, but an organic prohibition. Hence my urge to tell my wife.

I argued with myself. My first preoccupation, I said to myself, must be Nadya, the real woman, and not any urges of mine. I might feel anything I liked, but I must behave in such a way as not to hurt her. That was clear. But another thing was equally clear: that pain was not the supreme consideration, that trust and confidence were more important than pain. Nadya herself had pointed that out to me, several years before, when I had got the sack and kept it from her; it had taken her a long time to forgive me for that benevolent deception. I must be honest with her—just because she was a perfect wife and a fine woman. Besides, if I went on lying to her I should hurt her more in the end. For it was bound to come out sooner or later, these things always did: she was beginning to suspect the truth already in a vague groping way, and when it came out, the offence of deception would have been added to the pain of my defection.

For several days these two conflicting sets of arguments waged war within me. Then I told her, feeling like a murderer and yet knowing that I was doing the right thing.

She had seen enough life to know that will and morality are mere words where love is concerned, and she accepted my infatuation for what it was: a misfortune against which I was as helpless as herself. But she broke down when I told her that should Miriam wish it I would give up everything and follow her. She understood that I had no power over my heart; but that I should be ready to destroy our home,

to annul the years of our common struggle and companionship. . . . There is no need for me to dwell on our conversation; I may safely leave the details to the readers' imagination.

Our common life became a torment. Nadya changed overnight: a new face, lifeless, masklike, peered out from behind the familiar features, and I avoided looking at this new face, the sight of it frightened me and wrenched my heart. I tried to understand what had happened and could not. I had done the right thing in telling her, and yet the result was wrong, terrifyingly wrong!

At the same time my other delirious self continued striving for the possession of the woman who was the cause of all that trouble. I found a suitable *garçonnière*, rang her up, and gave her the address: for we were to meet on the following day.

There was a long pause before she answered.

"I'm sorry, my dear," she said apologetically, "but I don't think I'll come. I hate to disappoint you, but I feel I must think it over."

I could not believe my ears. Think it over! Good God, but she had been doing nothing else for two months! . . . However, this was not a subject that could be argued out over the telephone, so I asked her to see me, if only for half an hour, for a few minutes.

But she would not agree even to that. "No, I'd better not," she repeated again and again, and in the end she said she would write to me.

On leaving the telephone box I knew that I had already begun to pay. And so I had: in the week that followed I was able to form an idea of what hell must be like. I tried to persuade myself that the only course left was to break with her, break with her at once. But the body would not let me do it. For the first time in my life I became aware of the body in me as a complete self, independent of other selves, with its own will, its own system of desires and thoughts. When the rest of myself urged me to flee from her, the body went on longing for her; it invented fantastic explanations for what

I knew to be mere coldness and indifference on her part; it deceived me with hopes of a response which would miraculously awaken in her to-morrow or the day after if I only went on loving her and longing for her; and sometimes, tired of that deception, it went off in fits of brutal hatred. Ever since my stay at Eppswich I had been aware of a peculiar irritation in my finger-tips, as though they were throbbing with heat, and now, in these moments of hatred, the irritation grew so strong that I had to keep my hands pressed together. . . . I can understand the bliss of killing done with one's own hands: it must leave sexual ecstasy nowhere.

"If you don't love me, why not tell me so?" I asked her when we met next time, a week later.

"But I do love you. It isn't my fault that I'm slower than you. Why can't you let me love you in my own way?"

"Because that way of yours is killing our relationship. No relationship can stand this tempo, not now, not at this stage."

"I don't see that," she said obstinately, resentfully. "I only know you're trying to hurry me, and I won't be hurried."

She was only half sincere in saying that. She must have realised by then that her need of me was weakening, but she would not acknowledge it to herself, partly because her romantic self felt loath to break off an interesting affair, partly out of misconceived pity for me; hence her resentment. We were silent for a bit; then in a different tone, with genuine solicitude, she said: "You know, you look ghastly to-day, simply ghastly."

"I'm sorry," I said, smiling.

"Why, Nikolai? What's the matter?"

Befuddled though I was with longing, misery and insomnia, that "Why?" gave me a shock. I felt like saying something rude to her about emotional density, but instead I said in a small voice: "You know why."

Another week of waiting and helpless despair, and we met once more. This time, I remember, I caught the effect of her

presence on me at the very moment of its inception. I was feeling particularly wretched that day: it had been raining trouble the whole week. Nadya was unwell, life at home was a horror. I had come to the end of my tether, and when setting out for my tryst with Miriam I had firmly resolved to break with her. . . . When I entered the café she was there already; from the doorstep I saw the top of her head at a corner table; and the same instant it was as though a strong blast of wind passed through me, filling the whole of my being with a young jubilant happiness, blowing away all my misery and my resolutions. "It's only a moment, I'll get over it and say Good-bye," I told myself. But I did not get over it, that feeling of buoyant happiness did not leave me until the end of our meeting. . . . I wish those who moralise about self-control in love had had an experience of this kind: it would make them understand that, just as an atheist cannot force himself deliberately into a state of belief, in the same way no inner effort, no amount of straining and puffing can free a man from a full-grown love, passion or mania—call it what you will. But then the moralisers are organically incapable of giving themselves up to anything or anybody.

Soon after that she went to Scotland for ten days. She wrote to let me know on the very day of her departure—on purpose, I presume—to prevent me from ringing her up and to save herself the bother of an explanation. Her letter began with My dear and ended with Love. I threw it into the fire and told Nadya that the whole thing was as good as over. But the news failed to cheer her up: she had been too badly hurt.

For two months I had not done a stroke of work. In general I am very industrious: I can force myself to write practically at any time, even if it means sitting for an hour or two before a virgin sheet of paper. Now, however, my power of concentration was gone, my mind had got completely out of control. Usually I think in images or feelings only, without words (hence my inarticulateness); now I thought in images, feelings and words simultaneously, and

at a speed which at present, when I look back on that time, seems unbelievable.

I made some curious observations concerning the abnormal state I was in. Here are a few of them.

Heightened activity of the heart. It often beat so wildly that I thought others could not help noticing it. I took my pulse. Normally it is 76; now it was mostly 90-100. The queer thing was that it had no relation to my inner state at the moment. Once I counted 140 when I was feeling perfectly quiet; on another occasion, when it seemed as though my ribs were going to break, it was only 80.

Difficult breathing: a permanent knot in the region of the diaphragm. I could loosen that knot at will, but only for a short time. I could not sing at all because of it, not even in *mezza voce*.

A tingling sensation in my finger-tips. I have mentioned that already.

Muscular contraction. Every evening as I went to bed the upper part of my body—shoulders and chest—was tired as if I had been carrying heavy weights. I could not understand it until one day, walking in the street, I caught myself bracing these muscles. I relaxed, but a minute later I found I was bracing them again. The procedure was repeated half a dozen times, then I gave up interfering: it was obviously no good.

The same with the jaws: they were set all the time unless I consciously relaxed them, and in the evenings I felt a dull ache under my ears.

The rheumatism from which I had been suffering ever since my trip in the unheated frigate was gone, completely, unbelievably gone. (It came back later on.)

I lost all taste for music, and I know the exact day when that began: it was the day when I kissed Miriam in Eppswich for the first time. Not only could I not sing or hum, but I could not listen either, especially to good music: the first bar would release a current of irritation in me and make me feel restless.

My insomnia continued, and I now felt the full stress



of it. Sleeping draughts did not help; I longed for a proper breakdown.

When Miriam asked me to call on her at Hampstead I knew at once what that meant.

She was friendly, solicitous about my looks, and sorry to hear that I could not work. She told me about *San Michele* which she had just read, and about the new Russian ballet she had seen. It took her a long time to gather courage for the final plunge.

"I've thought it over," she said dreamily, "and I see that I don't love you enough to . . . to do what you want me to do. I'm terribly sorry, I know it must pain you . . ."

At this juncture I burst into laughter. It was not hysterical, but came from the sense of a sudden liberation. Certainty, any certainty, was a relief after that terrible feeling of impending end which had weighed on me through the last weeks.

"What's the matter? Why are you laughing?" she asked me, perplexed.

"Because you looked so funny when you said it. Solemn and apologetic and stern. Like a nurse administering a nasty medicine."

She did not understand my mood—she never understood anything about me. "What a strange man you are!" she said. I stopped laughing.

"I know what you're thinking," I said. "You're thinking that if I take it so lightly, that means that I don't really love you and never did. And do you know what makes you think that? A wish, of course, as is always the case with thoughts: the wish to be able to say to yourself: He's all right now, I needn't worry about him any more. . . . No, I'm only joking!" I cried when I saw the obstinate look in her eyes. "It's gallows humour, as the Germans call it."

She looked away, still perplexed.

"I'm glad if it makes you happier," she said hesitatingly. "I'm frightfully sorry it should have happened like that. I'm afraid I didn't know my own feelings."

"No, apparently you didn't."

Then we parted, quietly, rather solemnly. At home I told Nadya what had happened. She cried that evening, and that was a good sign, for she had not cried since my confession to her.

My feeling of relief did not last long, and the following day I was plunged back into misery. Thank heaven I was spared the revolt of injured pride—for that stupid appendix is undeveloped in me—but the despair of the thwarted body was bad enough. And there was another injury even worse than the bodily misery. The woman had hurt not only that transitory being, the Lover, which her contact had brought forth in me, but also my permanent self, the whole of me. That she had done not by rejecting my love—for Zoya and Lydia had rejected it too, and I had never borne them a moment's grudge—but by having consistently treated me in a spirit of selfishness, as a plaything for her senses, as a pastime for her leisure. With fear and dismay I realised that she had left me nothing, absolutely nothing to counteract the pain, not one memory worth cherishing. Desire had made her eyes sparkle and her body lean against mine, but she had never given me a grain of her soul, a grain of that ordinary human sympathy which one receives from friends and often from strangers. She had never fulfilled a single request of mine, never thrown up one paltry engagement for my sake; she had let me see her only when and so long as it suited her convenience. "I'm sorry, I have to go now"—and off she would be to her dressmaker's, her hairdresser's. She had kept me as one keeps a vase in the attic—in case one might think of a place for it some time later on. It had taken her weeks to realise the price I was paying for the privilege of loving her. . . . One can do without amorous response, but not without sympathy. When, twenty years earlier, I had broken down on Lydia's veranda she had stroked my hair, and when I rose from the steps her eyes were filled with tears and pain—*my* tears and pain, *mine*. That may be a trifle, but the spiritual kernel of that trifle had vitality enough in it to save what was valuable in our relationship, to save it for ever. But when

Miriam had told me that we must part, her first thought was—I knew it, I read it in her eyes—that she needn't bother about me any more.

She haunted me day and night, a cold-eyed, hard-featured ghost, a morbid obsession, a disease of the spirit. After a time I wrote to her, asking her to help me to shake off that obsession. We met and we talked. Needless to say, our meeting was futile. She understood nothing; again and again she repeated that I had been too fast and had tried to force her nature. What is it that makes her inhuman? I wondered. Wealth? . . .

I have not seen her since. She is on another continent, with more than three thousand liquid miles between us.

Three years have passed since then, and I have discussed this pathetic romance of mine with several people (I could never see why one should make a secret of one's life so long as the identity of the other party remained hidden).

My wife still does not understand how I could have lost my head over a woman like Miriam.

"But you say yourself there was nothing in her," she says.

"Nothing."

"And you knew there was nothing?"

"Yes and no. Take her face, for instance. With my brain I knew she was plain, and yet looking at her gave me a greater thrill than I could get from looking at the most beautiful woman in the world. The same with her mind. I knew there was not much in her, but everything she did and said filled me with wonder. I can't explain it, these things are transcendental to reason."

"Anyhow, you'll never make me believe it was love." For to her, as to most women, love is mixed up with goodness: where there is no goodness, there can be no love.

"You prefer to call it passion? All right, the word doesn't matter."

She holds that my readiness to break up my home and follow Miriam was bad and wrong. "I know," she says, "that I, for instance, could never have entertained that thought, however badly I were in love."

"You couldn't, because you are different from me. Evidently you have some fireproof bits in you, and I have none. The whole of me was on fire, except one corner in the brain."

"But didn't you think of duty?"

"Seldom, and only for short moments. It was no use."

"That shows that you have no sense of duty."

"No, it doesn't. You know that all through twenty years of married life I've always put your interests above mine. Except when I was going to Russia—but that was another duty, superseding my duty towards you—and the second time with Miriam."

"Then it was simply weakness on your part."

"Was it? Well, imagine a man falling into the hands of a gorilla and being mauled by it. You won't tell him: 'You ought to have defended yourself better, you oughtn't to have been so weak.' Why won't you tell him that? Because you know or believe that the gorilla is far too strong for a man to put up a fight against it. That was my case: I came up against something quite beyond my strength, I simply couldn't fight. But for some reason you don't see that. . . . What a pity I can't let you see these things from inside me."

On this point Elsa understands me completely.

"This lady of yours seems to have been your Type," says Elsa. "And Type, in the sexual sense of the word, is fatal. One can't resist it, which puts the whole matter beyond right and wrong."

Vincent does not quite know what attitude to take and goes off at a tangent.

"You Russians are a fantastic lot. You have no scruples about burning a few towns in the name of your beloved, but when she offers herself to you you step humbly back with a: *Je suis désolé, Madame*, but the design of these wall-papers doesn't quite suit the very particular nature of my amorous sentiment."

And Leslie says:

"If you don't mind my saying so, you were a fool to tell Nadya." And when I press him further he admits that it was not good form on my part.

This is really the only debatable point. Ought I to have kept my infatuation secret from her to the end?

I do not think so. Not that I believe lying in practical matters to be bad intrinsically; it becomes good or bad according to a man's attitude to it. In this particular case it became bad the moment I felt that it was debasing and sullyng my relationship with my wife. It was a justifiable feeling in that it was spontaneous, not suggested from outside and not cerebral, not deducted from a theory. And spontaneous urges of that kind must be obeyed, firstly, because they are the deepest and the truest of all there is in man, and secondly, because there is no suppressing them. If one tries to suppress them they will come out in some other way and do even more harm. Had I compelled myself to disregard that urge and gone on keeping my secret, I should have injured my relationship with my wife much more severely than I actually did. I remember those days when I was debating with myself whether to tell her or not; I remember the state of turmoil I was in, and how the very sight of her filled me with misery and made me hate her at moments (because I was unconsciously making her responsible for my conflict). Had I not confessed to her, that irritation would have grown and produced some ugly outburst in the end. And on the top of that she would have discovered the truth—for these things cannot be concealed indefinitely—and then her faith in my honesty would have gone for good. Yes, I am absolutely sure that I did the right thing; pain, however cruel, is not the supreme consideration in personal relationships.

Where I went wrong was in telling her about my readiness to abandon her for the sake of the other. At that time I was by no means sure whether that contingency would arise, nor could I, crazy as I was then, be sure in advance how I should behave if it actually came to a crisis and a choice. That crisis existed as yet in my imagination only, and one has no business to blab out all one's thoughts any more than one's dreams: they often have no real significance, but they can hurt as much as if they had. In other words, my confessional urge carried me too far, to what I now consider a crime.

After this digression I am coming back to the story at the point where I have left it. Slowly, very slowly, Nadya was recovering. She did not reproach me, she never said: "It's all over between us," as women usually do in these cases. She was too human, or, as I would put it, too much of a realist to be led astray by any such abstractions as the Dignity of a Wife or the Sanctity of Marriage. She had been wounded; how and why was a question of secondary importance; her job was to bear the pain and wait for the wound to heal. I often wished she would storm at me and be a little vulgar, for then I should not have felt as caddish as I did.

For a long time she refused to speak about Miriam. But I returned to the subject again and again, on purpose: I wanted her to "have it out." Stifled conflicts are poisonous, and I believed then, as I do now, that the only radical cure for diseased relationships is *not* tenderness and *not* repentance, which are but palliatives, but *understanding, understanding and understanding*. We talked, and once or twice she cried; in time, however, she grew used to the subject.

"It was wrong of her to hold you so long," she said. "She ought to have seen what she was doing to you."

"She was not sure about herself," I retorted, attempting to be fair to one whom I condemned as severely as Nadya did.

"Nonsense! A grown-up woman always knows whether she loves a man or not."

"And if she doesn't know?"

"She must know. And if she doesn't, then . . . then she is inhuman."

No, not inhuman, I thought, but simply very selfish, so busy with herself as not to see what happens to others through her: indifferent through lack of imagination. Once more I came across the thought which had often passed through my mind in Newcastle when I reflected on social injustice, the thought that indifference is a much bigger and more dangerous force than wickedness. Wickedness is rare: in the whole of my life I have only met two or three people—Russians all of them—who enjoyed causing pain to others. In ninety-nine cases out of a hundred man causes pain not out of malice but

through sheer inability to visualise how other people will be affected by his action or omission to act. The "hard" capitalist, for instance, feels no hostility towards his workmen: on the contrary, he would love to see them happy and well-off, their poverty makes him feel uneasy (what is commonly called compassion). But he has various contraptions which enable him to forget his unease. Business is one: he lets himself be engrossed in the inanimate life of figures and contracts, and the human factor moves off the field of his vision. Entertainment is another: he drives about from place to place, chats, swallows cocktails, and everything is all right with the world. Yet another consists in inventing and keeping up some nebulous senseless formula calculated to justify the *status quo*: a formula of Individual Endeavour, Bloodthirsty Communism, or some preternatural economic law. The same kind of contraptions can be seen at work in personal relationships, as when, for instance, some violation of a man's petty habits makes him be rude to his wife. He is not malevolent at that moment, he does not want to hurt her—not at first: simply, his attention is so absorbed by the protest of his thwarted habits that he fails to notice he is hurting her.

Nadya was the first and heaviest bill I had to pay. There were a few minor ones. My teeth were ruined: the result of three months of insomnia, said the dentist. Before, I used to sing, and the very few people who had heard me thought I had a voice. Now when I opened my mouth nothing happened, just a croaky sound. It must have been an inhibition, for Miriam had a curious aversion to singing, and whenever I started humming she asked me not to. Anyhow, I shall never sing again.

More serious than that was my inability to write. I had the complete plan of a novel, but could not go on with it: the imaginative machinery of my mind was out of gear. I tried to think of another plot—as a rule they come easily to me—and failed. "Wait," said Nadya, "you aren't fit for work yet."

Obviously I was not. Although I had regained my sleep,

I was a sick man. A short physical effort was enough to exhaust me (by affecting my breath); I felt apathetic and depressed. What was more, I knew for certain that this time I would never get on my legs by myself, not if I waited for a year. The spirit was drained out of me.

Elsa said I was devitalised.

"You've been spending your vitality too recklessly," she said, "and it's slow business to replenish it, slower than with physical health. But it'll come back with time."

"It never will at this rate."

"Then the rate has to be increased."

"How?"

"Ah, that I can't tell. Not by you, not without help. Something will have to happen."

"Not another love affair!" I cried. "In that case I'd better go and drown myself right away."

Elsa wanted to know where, and we decided that the most suitable place would be the middle of the Pacific Ocean. Only I had not the money to get there, so would she lend it to me?

*Its Silly Face* came out in October. It was highly praised by a dozen intelligent critics, and high-hatted by the Bloomsbury set. Mr. Agate disliked it intensely and was very angry with my hero for kissing his wife on three or four occasions. What was wrong with that I could not understand. Anyhow, the novel sold 3,000 copies in England and 230 copies in America (a record on the wrong side!). "You are established now," said Vincent, but, true to my method of self-insurance, I would not believe him.

At that time I happened to read Aldous Huxley's essay on Pascal. Now Huxley is one of the most intelligent men in Europe, and I was highly pleased to find him adhering to a pet conception of mine, one at which Tavrov had hinted, and which occurs in Hindu philosophy: the conception of the Plural Self.



"Men do not want to admit," says Huxley, "that they are what in fact they are—each one a colony of separate individuals of whom now one and now another consciously lives with the life that animates the whole organism and directs its destinies. They pretend in the teeth of the facts that they are one person all the time thinking one set of thoughts, pursuing one course of action throughout life. . . . My music, like that of every conscious being, is a counterpoint, not a single melody, a succession of harmonies and discords. I am now one person and now another, *aussi différent de moi-même que des autres*, in La Rochefoucauld's words."

Exactly! Didn't I know all about that contrapuntal structure! Especially after that upheaval which Miriam had wrought in me! But no, people would not accept that obvious truth; in the face of the facts they stuck to the conception of a central ruling Ego. Nadya, Rodney and Vincent used to defend it heatedly, almost angrily, for it was a nice conception, flattering and comforting. "I am the master of myself, as omnipotent in my own universe as God is in His heaven." . . .

Elaborating the point of the Plural Self, Huxley arrives at a philosophy of Life Worship. The Life Worshipper, he says:

"accepts all the contradictory syntheses constructed by other philosophers. He is at one moment a positivist and at another a mystic, now haunted by the thought of death and now a Dionysian child of nature; now a pessimist and now an exuberant believer that God's in His heaven and all's right with the world. He holds these different beliefs because he is many different people . . ."

How very true! And how like Tavrov's dithyrambs to life, "glittering life, cruel and gentle, diverse and one, fierce and peaceful!" Yes, this is the only philosophy worthy of really intelligent people like Tavrov, Huxley and myself, people who dare to stand on their own legs and think on their own, rejecting all dogmas because all dogmas are based on arbitrary premises, rejecting even the dogma of consistency—for why the devil should they be consistent? And that is how I had

lived so far, letting myself expand, within the frame of a self-imposed discipline, in any direction I pleased to take. I had sought life in personal relationships and given myself to them whole-heartedly, unsparingly. I had worked like a nigger when there was work; I had thought more intensely than most; had stuffed myself with good music and good books; had never turned away from good wine—and temptation; etc., etc.

It was an excellent doctrine, excellent in all respects except that in the end it had involved me in an extremely nasty mess. I nearly smashed the greatest value I possessed: my relationship with my wife; only chance saved me from ruining at least two lives, and there I was, at a dead end, in a stupor of apathy, played out. Life-worship had betrayed me, just as it had betrayed Stavrogin, Dostoevsky's Intelligent Man, and his refined western cousin, Huxley (I know less than nothing about the man, I am judging by his books only). We had all of us come to the same horrid thing: the void. Dostoevsky's hero had got out of it by hanging himself; what Huxley was doing I did not know; as for myself, I felt that I could not go on living as I had lived so far, that I was fed up with my loose plurality and must organise it in such a way as to stand on my feet at present and obviate another disaster in the future. How to organise it? One thing was clear: that I could not accept any faith, were it faith in God, Marx or the Atom: I must at all costs preserve my spiritual freedom, freedom from premises. I must evolve from the point at which I had broken down and not go back; I must introduce order into my plurality, and not renounce it just because it had proved to be uncomfortable and dangerous.

I discussed this subject with a few people.

"What you want is faith," said Nadya, herself a fervent believer. "You can't do anything without faith." Which was clear but of no use to me.

Vincent would not take my problem seriously. To him, who had always lived on the principle of *Laisser aller*, the idea of planned life and planned self seemed so much hot air. His counsel was practical. What, he asked me, does a dog do if he

inadvertently falls into a cold pond? He climbs out, shakes himself (preferably on your trousers) and runs merrily on. This was what I ought to do: shake myself, and beware of ponds. (I am giving an essentially correct but perfectly unrecognisable *précis* of his long and heated argument. For his quick, un-English mind sees not one side of the question, and not two, but very many indeed, and all at the same time. Also his argument was further complicated by passionate asides to his dogs and children, curses at various inanimate objects which refused to turn up when required, and sharp sallies against my topsy-turvy Russian mentality.)

Profiting by a pause in his harangue, I said that much as I admired dogs, I could not emulate them. Racial limitation, no doubt. I lacked canine quiescence: certain questions worried me, and I had to have an answer to them.

My persistence exasperated Vincent.

"Then go and contemplate your own navel!" he cried. "It's a highly philosophical occupation, and cheap into the bargain."

Elsa counselled patience.

"In your present state you can't do anything," she said. "Wait till you have recovered your vitality. You want to find that plan of life, or whatever you call it?"

"Yes. Badly."

"That's all right then, the wish will do it. What you need now is a good shake-up, a pleasant one for a change. Supposing your next book sells 100,000 copies."

"It won't. My books are for intelligent people, and there aren't many of them. Besides, I can't start writing until I've got out of my present state."

"True, I forgot that. Oh well, something will happen. When one has reached a crisis things always happen."

She proved to be right.

I was walking one day along, let us say, Fulham Road, when a foreign-looking young woman accosted me. Could I not tell her, she asked in queer English, how to get to Cheyne Walk? As she was frightfully pretty and the topography of

Chelsea is rather sinuous, I offered—in German—to show her the way. "*Aber Sie sprechen ja deutsch vorzüglich!*" she said.

I took her to Cheyne Walk. She had lived there for a fortnight, and yet, she said, she got lost whenever she went out. "Oh, I can't remember all these beastly streets!" she cried with an impatient gesture, and casually suggested that I should come and have a cup of coffee with her. I went.

Apart from an excellent figure and eyes so lovely that a look of them made one feel gay and happy, she was talkative, intelligent, and tempestuous—definitely a personality. Music was her profession: she had come to London for two months, and wished she had not. For she abominated the London weather and the London air; talking English gave her a headache, and the English food was so horrid that she fed chiefly by herself, at home: three breakfasts a day. Food was *ganz egal* to her—hadn't she starved for three years in Mitteleuropa? She hated religion, because it was all hypocrisy, cave-men because they ran after her, and motor cars; was indifferent to the theatre; adored elephants, music and champagne. She showed me an album of the Vienna Ballet; impersonated—remarkably well—Mark Hambourg and Rachmaninov at the piano; played some charming Hungarian tunes; quoted from Nietzsche; and finally, in her casual way, said that I might stay to supper if I felt like it. It was a frugal supper: coffee, bread, fruit. We had a terrific argument about the meaning of Bolshevism—the ultimate meaning, of course—and when I rose it was eleven. "Come along whenever you feel like it," she said.

The night, as I walked home, was damp but poetical through and through owing to the memory of Ulli. "Lovely, lovely!" I thought, dodging a grimy, rumbling lorry. "Yes, she's a real woman," I decided when a squall of rain made me hunch my shoulders. In Hammersmith Broadway I found myself whistling the boisterous Smithy song from *Siegfried*, which changed by the middle of the Bridge into:

"That's the way to fall in love, fall in love, fall in love;  
That's the way to fall in love on a cold and nasty evening."

It was frightfully funny.

I saw Ulli several times. Then I called on Elsa.

"How are you getting on?" she enquired.

I was going to say: All right, but burst out laughing instead. I laughed and laughed and could not stop. Elsa's eyes grew round with surprise.

"What? Already?" she cried.

"Yes, already!" I shook with laughter. "If you only knew what lovely eyes she has!"

"You are quick!" She shook her head and laughed.

When we became reasonable and intelligent again, she said:

"You know, I suppose, that it's a dangerous game. And to win may be more dangerous than to lose."

"I know," I said, chuckling stupidly, as all happy people do. "But I'll risk it."

That happiness lasted for a couple of weeks. Then there was an uncomfortable period when I realised that I had gone much further than was good for me: I had in all earnest fallen in love with Ulli. Sighing heavily, I confessed my predicament to her. I was quite sure that she would kick me out, but she did not; she was most sympathetic and looked so eatable that I simply had to take her in my arms and kiss her. "*Aber Sie sind ja ganz verrückt!*" she cried. But there was madness in her too: she was born and had lived all her life in a sunny country where they do not choke their emotions.

Just then Dorothy, Nadya's friend in Newcastle, had the inspiration to ask Nadya to come up north for a week. Nadya went, I stayed. The children's sleep is sound; they did not hear their father as, with stealthy steps and a gloriously serene conscience, he ascended the staircase at six a.m. . . .

For all her temperament Ulli was a level-headed woman, considerate in a rough unsentimental way.

"And now no more," she declared when the week was over. "Finished. *Schluss. Fini.* I've had enough dramas in my life and I've learned one thing: not to make other people unhappy through me. So good-bye, *adieu.*"

"But listen, darling . . ."

"No, no, no, I won't listen. Out with you, out!"

She gave me a quick kiss, flashed her lovely eyes at me, and pushed me out on to the porch. "*Bravissima!*" I thought exultantly as I stood there, looking with longing at the closed door behind me. "That's how these things ought to be done."

There followed a period of readjustment, with a certain amount of pain thrown in. But this time it was good clean pain, and when it passed I was on my feet again. My apathy was gone; the thought of Miriam weighed on me no longer. A fish, I began to think, can't be blamed for being a fish.

A year later I told Nadya about Ulli. She was slightly hurt and considerably puzzled.

"I don't understand," she said. "You hadn't yet forgotten Miriam then?"

"No. Nor had I forgotten you. Don't you see . . ."

She did see, that is to say, she realised the inevitability of what had happened. "Don't do it again," were her concluding words and I said I would not.

A curious coincidence. This year, when returning from Austria, my daughter brought me a present. It was wrapped up in a newspaper, and the first thing I saw when I unfolded it was the announcement of a concert with Ulli's name on the programme.

Whether she has forgotten me or not, I shall always be her friend.

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## PLANNED SELF

**I**N the summer I made Arthur's acquaintance. Since Arthur is a fictitious entity standing for at least three persons—of which I am one—there is no need for me to describe or characterise him. Arthur taught me what I wanted to know.

I shall not expound the whole of his philosophy, but shall only give an outline of its psychological part, and only in so far as it has practical value, that is to say, enables man to put his inner world in order. Before proceeding, however, I must warn my readers that the whole trend of Arthur's ideas will be unacceptable to nine-tenths of them: firstly, to those who think that their inner world is "quite all right" as it is; and secondly, to those who believe that it can be put in order by the familiar means of religion or work or fun. To them I have nothing to say; their way may be excellent for them, but it is not mine, and I suggest that if they do not want to feel bored or angry, they should skip the whole of this chapter down to page 360.

Arthur's system has nothing mysterious or mystic about it. Its distinctive feature, the one which endeared it to me, is that no premises of any kind are postulated—no God, no Supreme Spirit, no Conscience; its only data being the immediate psychological facts which everybody can verify for himself in normal life. The first of them is the fact of the constant discord in which we all live, the disorganised state of our Plural Self. If, for convenience' sake, we conceive our personality as a three-storeyed factory—body, emotion, intellect—we shall see that the discord reigns both within each storey and between them. The body wants to do something, but at the same time is too lazy to do it. Our emotional self constantly oscillates between acquisitive ambition and unselfish kindness, a longing for excitement and a longing for peace, sympathy with people and a recoil from them. The intellect

says Yes one minute and No the next. Yesterday I felt sure that those Rio Negro shares were the best investment; to-day I am not so sure; to-morrow I will swear by Rio Rojo; and if I am honest with myself I will, as often as not, confess that I do not know what to think of these blinking Rios—and yet continue thinking in a blundering manner. A disorder in the body will affect both emotion and intellect: too much lobster will alter my feeling for my friend or make me renounce the idea of investing altogether. A romantic novel, by producing a disturbance in my sexual field, will impair my capacity for adding up figures. And so on.

Of all these processes and changes we know next to nothing, for we never take the trouble to investigate the working of the three-storeyed factory: we stupidly take it for granted that it performs the work we mean it to perform. So long as our life runs along smooth habitual grooves we manage to keep this comfortable delusion, and only when an unfamiliar force throws us out of that groove do we discover—always provided we have a minimum of intellectual honesty—that our power over ourselves is nil, that we have been doing this and that not because our Master Ego wanted us to do it, but Heaven knows why.

This “Heaven knows why” stands for two forces of which we are equally ignorant. One is suggestion, and the other, habit. The youth believes that he drinks because he wants and likes alcohol, whereas as a matter of fact he drinks to be complimented upon his manhood—suggestion!—and on the strength of those compliments, feel a man. Nor does a grown-up experience a physical need of whisky and soda as he thinks he does: he merely obeys a habit he originally formed to earn the approval of others—and his own. If I see a cripple in the street I may want to give him the thirteen shillings and eightpence which I have with me, but I shall not do so, because of the habit of thriftiness which others have inculcated into me. I may be indifferent to politics, but for fear of being accused of civic tepidity I will go on haranguing on tariffs and not notice my insincerity because it has become a habit with me. (All these processes, I repeat, take place in the dark; most of us do



not suspect their existence, and hardly anyone takes the trouble of tracing them in himself.)

Suggestions are obviously unequal in value. Respect for academic distinctions—even if they are conferred on nincompoops—is useful on the whole, for it stimulates interest in science. That queer urge which makes people stand five hours in pelting rain to see the official curvature of Princess Mariulla's lips is useless but also harmless. But a great many suggestions operative in civilised life are dangerous and harmful falsehoods. It is they that are responsible for all that humbug that blocks up and distorts individual and social life, in Parliament and Church, love and art, the family and the school, the Courts and the press. A man trains himself to be unresponsive and hard because square jaws or cynicism happen to be the fashion. Most people do not feel passionate about politics, but they behave as if they did because that is "the proper thing to do." Inch by inch they yield to the suggestions that bombard them from the cinema screen and the various *Daily Bangs*, with the result that they forget how to think for themselves. When after the war millions of essentially good-natured citizens were clamouring for the Kaiser's head, they were merely echoing the suggestions knocked into them by the sensation-mongers of the press and the tribune. And I am sure hardly any deceived husband would feel jealous, let alone commit violence, if he had not been impressed with ideas of Marital Dignity.

Then habits. If those brain-cells in which habit resides could be cut out, three church-goers out of four would discover, to their own surprise, that they have no wish whatever to go and hear the Rev. So-and-so. A similar surprise would fall to the lot of most people if they could be made to see their own views on morals and social matters from outside, deprived of the background of habit. That 615 wise men cannot alter the perfectly idiotic law of divorce, or do away with the equally idiotic presumption of insanity in cases of suicide, is due to the momentum of two hopelessly antiquated fictions—habits of mind: the sanctity of marriage in one case, and the sanctity of life in the other. Somewhere about 1909 a com-

mittee was set up in Petersburg to effect the transition from the old to the new style of calendar. The task was childishly simple—all one had to do was to cut out thirteen days; but five years passed, the Revolution came, and the learned committee had not yet done anything—a dilatoriness so senseless that it can only be explained by the irrational inertia of mental habit.

Those trying years I spent in Newcastle, and the presence of Nadya, a brilliant intuitive diagnostician, have taught me to distinguish between the “suggested” and the real man, first in others, and then—which was more difficult—in myself. It took me several years to realise, for instance, that my “patriotism” was largely suggestion: I myself did not really believe that my country was always right and always better and should always come first; that belief was a gramophone record which had been put into me when I was a boy and would automatically begin to turn as soon as the word Russia was uttered. I also noticed that, whilst I despised people for priding themselves on their wealth, I prided myself on being a Lytzeyan and a nobleman—two attributes which had as little to do with me, the man I was, as the balance of my banking account. I hated insincerity in others; yet I had it in myself too: I would catch myself posing now as a Philosopher, now a Strong Man, now—my favourite rôle—a hard-boiled Cynic—all in order to earn the approval of others. As I became cognisant of the effect of suggestion on me, it gradually weakened, and by the time I left Newcastle I was more or less natural, myself. And that, I thought, was enough.

It was not, as the incident with Miriam demonstrated. I was myself, but I had no idea how the self of mine worked. Why was it, for instance, that at moments I felt a stranger to Nadya, even an antagonistic stranger? Why, having proved to myself two hundred times that it is silly and degrading to lose one's temper with the children or worry about my impunctiousness, I would get angry or depressed on the two-hundred-and-first occasion exactly as I had done on the first? Whence did that acute boredom come which seized me at the sight of Mrs. X, who was a good woman and a good friend to

Nadya? Why was it that on certain days I could not write a line despite my feeling quite fresh? And, to wind up a list that may be extended *ad libitum*, why was it that a woman who had nothing in common with me had bowled me over in ninety-six hours? . . . I came to realise that I was a plaything of some unknown forces in me, forces which I could not resist because I did not know their nature.

Said Arthur on this subject:

"You happened to be living in abnormally uncongenial circumstances—that is why you became aware of the disorder in you. But the disorder is the same in everybody, and the reason for it is the same: lack of co-ordination within and between the three storeys of the self. Body, emotion, intellect—they all act each off their own bat, not knowing what their partners are doing, and not caring. The factory has no general manager, none of the three storeys has a foreman; no wonder the production is low, and the waste of time and energy colossal. And, of course, if a fire breaks out, the place at once becomes a Bedlam."

"What can I do about it?" I asked.

"Put your self in order."

"How?"

Now, I shall again warn my readers who have got to this point that most of them will thoroughly dislike what is to follow. They are used—a habit!—to clear-cut authoritative rules such as are imposed on them by religion, class-morals, police and club regulations: "Thou shalt do this," and "Thou shalt not do that," rules which free them of the necessity to think and decide for themselves. Now Arthur's idea is that no one can tell any one else what is good or bad, right or wrong, expedient or not; everyone has to find it out for himself, and can only do so by means of long strenuous work, which allows no miracles and no short cuts: you have to go on and on with it, and you never reach a point at which you can say: "I've done it." In my novel *Matthew's Passion* I have indicated the lines of that work. The chapter devoted to it is particularly clearly written—any intelligent boy of eighteen can understand it; yet people, including intelligent readers of my

acquaintance, have left it unnoticed. This, I submit, because they disliked the idea of having to do everything for themselves instead of relying on the guidance and assistance of some mystic or terrestrial Providence. Still, now I am on this subject I will go on and indicate the outlines of Arthur's doctrine, which, to borrow H. G. Wells's terminology, I might call the doctrine of the Planned Self.

"To put yourself in order," says Arthur, "you must first of all know yourself. The old, old *Gnothi seauton*. And in order to know yourself you must—and this is most important—give up all thought of improving yourself or putting yourself in order now, at once. Imagine a mechanic being taken to an engine which is unfamiliar to him and which does not work properly. He won't start mending it at once, he'll first study it by watching its functions. In the same way, you who are ignorant about the mechanism of your self mustn't tamper with it, for you'll only damage it if you try. You must confine your self to watching it as detachedly as the mechanic watches the engine, withholding all criticism, refraining from qualitative judgment: This is good, or: This is bad. For good and bad in the abstract do not exist, and what is good and bad for you you can't possibly know until your study is advanced enough."

"But I have studied myself, I've done so for many years!"

"No, you haven't. All you did was to observe yourself as a whole, without taking account of your plurality, without lifting the lid off your engine, so to speak. Also, the observer in you was always one or the other of your selves, which ought to be the object, not the subject of observation. One moment you watched yourself through the brain, another through your feelings, yet another through your instinct. The intellect stated one thing, the feelings another, and instinct stated nothing, but just prompted you to act in some way unexpected both to the intellect and the feelings. Also you weren't open-minded: you studied yourself through the prism of certain preconceived ideas—suggestions: you continually said: This is good, and: This is bad. Which vitiated the result, for it is as though a mechanic who didn't know a

mechanism were to trust his "impression" and decide straight-away that this wheel must turn faster and that rod ought to be pushed in. I repeat: the observation must be done from outside, not by any of your acting selves (body, intellect, emotion); and it must be done as dispassionately as you see things happen in a dream. Have you noticed that in a dream you can witness the most terrible event and not be moved by it, not judge it, just watch it? That's how you should see yourself. When you aren't moved by what you observe, moved either negatively or positively, you are seeing it correctly. It's surprisingly difficult, you'll have to try and try before you succeed; and once you have succeeded that won't absolve you from further efforts: every further observation will demand a new focusing of your attention. A work that has no end . . ."

"What is that dispassionate observer you are talking about?"

"It's the embryo of a self which is meant to be the organiser, the General Manager of the factory. At present it's just a one-cell embryo, incapable of performing any work whatsoever, but it can grow through training, as muscles do. Not miraculously, not in a moment, nor even in a month, but very slowly, also like a muscle."

"Some people seem to have developed that organising self without introspection," I interjected (thinking of Nadya).

"No, *they* haven't done it. If you look closer you will see that it's a matter of heredity—they were born with an unusual capacity for self-organisation. Now, you can't alter your heredity, so why speculate about it? and why drag in other people? It's waste of time. Think of what you *can* do to improve the nature you've got and to control the effect of your actual environment on your mind. And once you start thinking of that, you'll come back to what I've been telling you all the time: to self-knowledge and introspection.

"Now, as to what you should study. The answer is: everything that is in you, and particularly every friction that arises in you—anger, fear, depression, anything that produces a conflict in you. The important point is to catch that friction at

the moment of its inception, for then you can see best what part of you it comes from. Take an ordinary irritation produced by a shock to some habit of yours. Less than a second suffices for that irritation to grow from zero to its full development, and then the ugly word is said and the harm is done. If you've missed that first second you've impaired the value of your observation. Or take that feeling of boredom which you say a certain female produces in you. Here again it's the moment of inception that counts: once it's gone you'll find it difficult to trace the origin of your emotion.

"You'll discover things in you of which you have no notion at present. The first thing that will strike you will be that a surprising number of your reactions—gestures, feelings, thoughts—do not express either your personality or any wish of yours, but occur automatically, just because they've occurred so many times before. They are like well-oiled wheels: once you've touched the spring they start turning and go on turning for a long time, whether their motion helps the work of the mechanism as a whole or not. Some of the habits, the older ones, can even assume the characteristics of a full-blown self, with its own system of emotions and reasonings: the Patriotic Self, the Drinking Self, the Drawing-room Self, and so on. Apart from these there are the genuine, unsuggested selves, each of which tries to fill the whole of you, each of which says: 'I am you,' although it is only a part of you, the physical, emotional or intellectual part. I repeat, it takes a lot of time and perseverance to disentangle their interaction in yourself. You may take a few good snapshots of yourself in the first ten minutes, and then achieve nothing for a month. Go on trying all the same, as often as you can, the oftener the better. Are you aware, for instance, that just now, as you're sitting in that chair, your breast muscles are contracted? And that you're drawing little triangles with your left foot? And that there is a crease of strain round your mouth? . . . When you write, watch out for your thoughts, and you'll see that if you can't get a sentence right this is usually because part of your brain or your emotional self is fretting about something extraneous to your work, something

which ought to be non-existent for you at the moment. You're wasting energy all the time, through splitting your attention and your emotions; no wonder you're tired and complain of dullness. If you stop that waste you'll easily double your stock of energy."

"But why should it double? You said yourself that I must confine myself to watching, and not try to alter myself."

"Yes, but I haven't told you yet that *seeing a thing is changing it*. Seeing, if it's done correctly, that is to say, from outside, detachedly, without volition, is an actual force much stronger than the volitional effort; the Roman Catholic monks know something about it. I can't explain why that is so without going into metaphysics, and you seem not to be interested in metaphysics. But remember, we are dealing with psychology, and not with logic. Didn't you tell me yourself that the best cure for a sick relationship is understanding? It is. To cure a relationship you must understand it, and to understand it you must detach yourself from it, just as a doctor inwardly detaches himself from the suffering of his patient. It's an illogical psychological fact; let's leave it at that for the time being."

"Where is the assurance that self-knowledge will affect my selves in the right way?"

"How do you know that understanding between people, individuals or groups of individuals, affects them in the right way? Empirically only: you can't prove it by any syllogisms."

"True. . . . And when I possess a good deal of self-knowledge, shall I be able to control my self or my selves?"

"Yes. But that won't happen for a long time, and you'd better not think of it, so as not to be tempted to exercise that control prematurely."

"Another question: Doesn't study kill its object? I should hate to become anæmic or ascetic."

"No danger of that. Study can certainly kill its object, but, like understanding in relationships, it only kills what is superfluous for the whole, that is to say those useless or harmful emotions, urges and thoughts, in which you waste

half of your energy. Like everybody else, you are overdriven through wasting your energy day and night in that inner discord we've been discussing. You're weak, that's your trouble, and the first thing to do with a weak man is to restore his strength."

"Suppose I get stronger. Does it follow that I'll also be better?"

"Better! When will you stop worrying about Good and Bad? What do you know, what does anyone know about Good and Bad?"

"We all feel it, though."

"Feel it! So now we are back to the good old emotion? Hasn't it played enough tricks on you? aren't you tired of its vagaries and contradictions and fuss? No, you must once for all give up thinking on the lines of morality. It's an unprofitable occupation which can only lead you to lifeless abstractions or to that very chaos which you want to escape. Think of yourself and of putting your machinery in order. You don't know how it works—study it. It's wasting energy—stop that waste. There is no mechanic to regulate it—grow that mechanic. Then and only then will you be able to see what is good and bad for you. The good, you'll see, is what you really want with the whole of your self; the bad, what you do not want with the whole of your self."

"I may discover that I really want to commit murder."

"Excellent! You'll do it and be hanged. . . . But let's analyse what that word 'really' means. Did it strike you that 'real,' that is to say born killers are frightfully rare, rarer than clairvoyants? In eight cases out of ten people kill not from instinctive disposition, but in obedience to some outside suggestion, the suggestion of vanity or a political group—or the State. In the ninth case they kill through weakness, through sheer lack of co-ordination between their selves, as happens in *crimes passionnels* and street brawls. The same applies to all crimes. Take theft. Hardly one per cent of thefts are committed instinctively or through absolute necessity; the rest usually have their motive in vanity which is an outside suggestion. . . . But why dwell on these hypo-



thetical horrors? You are a normal man and you may count on normal development."

"Can you give me an idea of what an organised man will be like?"

"He will be a complete man. That is to say, he'll do what his whole self wants and approves of, and not do the rest. He'll be entirely himself. Isn't that enough to strive for?"

Is it? I wondered. Do I want to be not myself, but somebody else: that radiant youngster, for instance, who is passing me in a car; or Mr. James Higginson, whose novel has gone into a twenty-third edition; or Chaliapin, the idol of two continents; or even St. Augustine? No, I do not. Much as I admire and/or envy them for this and that, I won't change places with any of them—Heaven knows why. Now and for ever I want to be myself, wholly myself. Had I always been wholly myself, and not a plaything of my minor selves, I should not have got into that romantic mess, I should not have wasted my energy in thinking about hundreds of things irrelevant to the task of the moment, and worrying, futilely worrying, about what was beyond my control; I should have made my wife's struggle easier instead of more difficult; and the energy saved I should have used for some positive purpose, a purpose which the whole of me approved of. What more could a man wish for, short of becoming a Superman?\*

Thus I came to know what I wanted to know.

Deep troubles of the soul often take a very long time to mature. It was only in the autumn, when the unfortunate business with Miriam seemed to be quite forgotten, when my relationship with Nadya was mended, and I had resumed writing, that she had a nervous breakdown. All vitality left her; she was so weak that she could not sit up.

\* These ideas are in the air; cf. H. G. Wells's *Anatomy of Frustration* and especially Dr. Jung's latest works. I have no doubt whatever that the opening up of the subconscious and the understanding of its laws will more than compensate man for the loss of the major and minor deities—metaphysical, ethical and nationalistic—which hitherto have determined his attitude to life, and which are slowly dying now; cf. also Geraldine Coster's remarkably intelligent and lucid book: *Yoga and Western Psychology*.

Friends looked after her—for we have excellent friends—and in a month she was up. I made a discovery then: that I loved her more than before. Perhaps after eighteen years of married life our relationship had needed a storm to save it from getting stale?

I looked for literary work and found none. I could not even get any Russian reading from the publishers. Through that whole year I had only one minor stroke of luck: the B.B.C. commissioned me to give them some material for the Russian soirées they were staging at the time. The whole thing was a farce. I would write a light dialogue, generously peppered with reminiscences of adventures in old and revolutionary Russia; from that dialogue the B.B.C. would pick out half a dozen sentences and fill in the rest with stuff which when I heard it made my blood curdle. "My dear Prince de Ivanov, show us that you are truly Russian and have some of this exquisite Volga caviare." "Thank you, dearest Countess, but we old Hussars of the Imperial Palace Guard never touch caviare without vodka, ha-ha-ha!" And so forth. Since I had taken the precaution of keeping my incognito I did not grumble, but only wondered whether public money could not be spent in a more sensible way. Anyhow, these orders soon ceased and the aristocratic assemblies at Portland Place went on without my co-operation.

I had started another novel in the autumn, and wrote all through the winter at my usual slow speed. The theme—not the one I had originally chosen—was my affair with Miriam, which I was recording fairly truthfully. There was no indiscretion in that: her identity was only known to myself and my wife, and I had to have the incident out of my system, as had been the case with Newcastle and Rodney. I had to understand what had happened to me.

When the manuscript was finished I showed it to Nadya and Arthur. Nadya, of course, reprimanded me for undressing myself; Arthur said:

"You're quite right in saying that sexual attraction has no rhyme or reason. It is a law unto itself. One might almost assume that sex has a special kind of electricity. A man and a

woman may have nothing in common emotionally or intellectually; and yet, once their wave-lengths coincide, they go mad."

I asked him whether my feeling for Miriam had been love or not. He shrugged his shoulders.

"Love is but a word," he answered, exactly reproducing what Tavrov had said twenty years earlier, "and you may give it any meaning you choose. The reality behind the word is that at the approach of a certain woman, the life of all your selves gets enormously intensified and speeded up, with the result that you become even more chaotic than you were—but also more brilliant. You remember what I told you about a fire breaking out in a factory which has no manager? . . . Struggle against sex? Good God, no! How can you struggle against the deepest call in you if you can't even control your superficial emotions? These electrical encounters, if they happen after marriage, are to be considered as a misfortune."

"It follows," I said, "that had I known myself at the time the trend of events would have been the same."

"No. Only the beginning would have been the same. You would have been overwhelmed by sexual gravitation, you would have raved a couple of days and gloried in your ravings. But very soon, at the first dissension, you would have recognised that she was a stranger to you, and also that your other selves were not involved in the tumult. That would have made you part with her much earlier than you did. There would have been some pain, but much less than there was, for your emotions and your intellect would not have been swamped by the misery of your body. And you certainly would not have made that mess at home.

"The lady? Oh well, she knew as little about herself as you did about yourself, so you aren't really entitled to condemn her, are you? Probably she'd read too many novels and they had suggested to her that she should have a fling too. Anyhow, the less you think about her, the better. She isn't your concern, you'd better think of what you ought to do with yourself."

My novel was published in the summer under the title of *Matthew's Passion*. It was well received by the press, but sold badly. The public on the whole found it unlikable, particularly the women did. For most people still stick to the romantic conception of love, they still think of love as something sweet and glorious; whereas I presented them with a case of love in which these qualities were more than counterbalanced by sordidness and cruelty. If what I presented to them was not love but "mere passion," then again I was wrong from their point of view: passion ought to be base and stultifying and corroded by remorse, whereas I refused to condemn my hero and demanded sympathy for him even when he struck at his charming wife. Whichever way they took it, the book was unlovely and, worse than that, insidious, as is illustrated by the following extract from an anonymous letter with a Haslemere, Surrey, postmark (the novel had come out under the pseudonym *Michael Goring*):

"Oi oi, Mr. Gubsky, is it that you a Jew are that you a good British name must affix to your un English writings. . . . So long as you used your own Polish or Russian name the English readers would smile tolerantly at the quaint and humourless expression of your far from original ideas, but you lose their toleration and sympathy when you borrow an English cloak. Do you never think how ashamed your child or children will be in the days to come of your literary efforts, your constant references to money, your cheap sneers at the gentlemanly traditions which you do not even begin to understand" . . . etc.

Here is a typical Mass-Man speaking, a product of suggestion, a man with a rigid code of values exactly defining the borders between Good and Bad, English and un-English, Love and Lust. This code was read to him by his parents and relations at Haslemere, preached at his school, and later on at his office and his golf club, confirmed by the cinema, the *Daily Bangs*, and hundreds of smug genteel novels. Twenty, thirty, forty years may have gone to consolidate these habits of mind; no wonder that when he read a book which was

un-traditional in every respect he grew indignant and exploded.

This letter represents exactly fifty per cent of my fan mail. The other fifty per cent arrived some years ago from an American lady in Cleveland, Ohio, who had read *The Gladiator*. She wrote:

"Your book is certainly fine. It reveals a profound, penetrating rare insight into life and its problems. You write as if you understand life and humanity; and they are not easily understood. You are certainly a very wise and brilliant person, a deep understanding of human nature is revealed in your splendid, powerful novel. Therefore I would love to receive a personal reply from you, so please answer the following questions:

"What do you believe is more important in its influence: environment or heredity? Why?

"Do you believe in whipping naughty children or not? Why?

"How can children be reared to face life bravely?" etc.

I thanked the lady for her flattering letter and apologised that for lack of time I could only answer two of her questions: Yes, I did believe in whipping naughty children. Why? Because there is nothing like whipping to make them face life bravely. . . . I am sure she took my answer seriously!

The winter of 1935 I spent in writing *Surprise Item*, a novel about Communists in England. My views on Communism have crystallised by now, and I propose to vent them here. Once more I submit that only those readers who are thoroughly dissatisfied with the present social régime can be interested in this passage; the rest had better skip to page 369

The Money Régime (Capitalism, Bourgeois Régime) is dying. Whatever its merits in the past, it has proved itself utterly incompetent to deal with the present economic problems, and in all countries an ever-increasing majority are fed up with it. Its ideological foundations—Holy Property, Production for Production's sake, Efficiency of the Better Class

People—have rotted: not even the capitalists believe in them any longer. The régime exists by sheer momentum of habit and the fear of an upheaval—the same two motives which make a slum family stick to an obviously uninhabitable house. Russia has risked that upheaval and is still alive—much more alive in fact than any of the capitalist countries, and there is no doubt that they will, sooner or later, follow her example. They will have to. As L. H. Myers says so aptly in his novel *Strange Glory*:

“In the history of the world there are moments when men must make a change, must strike out on a new path. What is the right rule of life in one period may become the wrong one in the next. The same inspiration, the same spiritual force is at work; but when the hour comes the change is enjoined. That the new spirit should appear materialistic—should indeed believe itself to be materialistic—must not confuse you. The explanation is this: the new spirit is in arms against a social order that continues to fly the banner of idealism after it has lost the right to do so. . . . Such changes often seem cruel, especially when, as to-day, many good men are without the vision to transfer their allegiance.”

What the new régime will be, whether Communism, State Socialism, or something else, no one knows: people cannot even agree as to what these terms mean. But it will be a planned régime, one in which the position of a man in society will be determined not by the irrelevant fact of his or his father's having so many pounds sterling (or francs or dollars), but by the work he does for the common welfare. In all European countries the Army and the Civil Service were for centuries conducted on these two principles: Planning and Fairness, and have achieved more or less the same efficiency as private enterprise. It is therefore stupid to say that trade and industry cannot be planned. They can. At first, they will work clumsily and haltingly, then better and better—as the Post Office has done, or the German State Mines, or as the Soviets are doing now.

At this point some readers may ask me: Do I advocate

Revolution? To which my answer is a shrug of my shoulders. To advocate Revolution is as futile as to advocate snow on the 16th of December. If on that day certain conditions of dampness and temperature prevail, snow will fall, whether I or anyone else wish it or not. And if in a given nation hardship and discontent pass beyond a certain limit—a limit which no one can guess in advance and which is always nearer than people think—the Revolution will break out with or without our approval. The point is not to indulge in wishes to which History won't listen, anyway, but to think of how to quicken and smoothe over the transition to the new Planned Régime, so as to avoid the wholesale destruction and demoralisation which accompany Revolution.

The greater the number of people ready to "transfer their allegiance" to the coming régime, the easier will be the transition. In other words, if the Revolution is not to come from below, as an outburst of exasperated passion, then it must come from above, as a deliberate, rationalised reform. The best preparation for that deliberate planned Revolution is thinking, critical thinking. If only one-half of those who are holding economic power could, by some magical means, be made to overcome their habits of mind and *see* society apart from their personal interests, as detachedly and impartially as a mechanic sees an engine, the problem of transition would be solved in no time and the country would pass to the new régime as peacefully as it passed to Universal Suffrage.

The Russian experiment has greatly eased the task of transition for Western Europe by demonstrating what should be avoided and why. In Russia the ruling classes were not prepared to "transfer their allegiance," and the result was Civil War. The worst thing about the Civil War was not that so many bridges, estates and lives were destroyed, but that the ranks of the cultured, i.e., highly qualified workers, were horribly depleted. Some of them were killed in the fighting; the rest submitted—too late. The strain of the war had broken the victors too: they, the Communists, had become afflicted with the most terrible disease known to humanity: Mass Hysteria, which is a pathological inflation of emotion at

the expense of the instinct and the intellect. The Communists fell a prey to passion, two passions: fear, since the Civil War had shown them how precarious their power was; and hatred for the class which had dared to resist them. It was these passions which prevented the Soviets from realising their victory and settling down to the work of reconstruction.

The Civil War was completely over by 1922. By that time foreign intervention had died its natural death, the White Armies had ceased to exist, the counter-revolution was utterly crushed. Napoleon in a similar situation did the right thing: he announced that the political past was forgotten, and everybody, Jacobins and Royalists alike, were welcome to work for the State, provided they acknowledged his power. Hence the amazingly quick recovery of France. Not so in Russia. In vain Lenin, the strongest intellect amongst the Communists, repeated over and over again that "Communism must learn business." His mind was not swamped by passion, he knew that Russia could not afford to do without those cultured elements which had survived the Civil War: the thousands and thousands of doctors, engineers, book-keepers, agronomers, sea captains, architects—tainted though they were by belonging to the class of the Oppressors in the past. Had it rested only with him, he would have exploited them all to the extent of 100 and 110 per cent of their working capacity. But he could not cure a million Communists of hysteria. To them these doctors, engineers, etc., were not potential collaborators but Blood-suckers, Enemies of the Proletariat bristling with seditious designs. They were given work, since without them nothing could be done at all; but at the same time they were subjected to a systematic persecution which lowered the efficiency of their work to a dangerous level, and which—whatever the English Communists and parlour Bolshies may say—is still going on. Whenever something went wrong they—these cultured workers—were banished, imprisoned, or shot. When nothing went wrong, they had but to grumble to be accused of Sabotage and be banished or imprisoned; and if they kept silent, their silence was taken as evidence of their anti-Soviet mentality; they were bullied,



spied upon, third-degreed. It is silly to blame the Bolsheviks for the horrors of the Civil War: *à la guerre comme à la guerre*. But that persecution of valuable workers *after* victory was sheer wantonness. "We'll learn from you and then liquidate you," the Communists used to say to them with engaging frankness and that, if cruel, was logical at any rate. But in practice that formula was not adhered to: liquidation came first. Thus it was that whilst the prisons and timber camps were stuffed with highly qualified workers, the reconstruction of Russia was carried on by good Marxists with six or nine months' training: they had the true faith, so they were deemed fit to build bridges, organise hospitals and observatories, and manage rubber factories. . . . Foreign observers looked at a factory, looked at the goloshes which it turned out, and went into raptures over the Soviet efficiency. But they did not see the appalling waste of material and energy that accompanied the production of these wretched goloshes—tons and millions spent where hundredweights and thousands would have sufficed, scores of families broken up and ruined, oceans of depression and suffering spilt by amateur bosses who made up for lack of competence by emotional fury and the scorpions of the Che-Ka, OGPU or whatever it called itself. What Russia has achieved in reconstruction may be admirable, considering her difficulties; but my point is that if the Communists had not given in to hysteria, if they had not made themselves imagine the aura of counter-revolution round every trained brain, if they had not cultivated the gentle Che-Ka until it got the whole of their Party under its thumb, *Russia would have been where she is now by 1930*. And to defer the growth of a nation is a historical crime equally unpardonable, whether it comes from the stupidity of a Tsar or the mental disarray of a party. . . . Quite recently the Communists have, or so it seems, begun to sober down: in 1934, that is to say twelve years after the victory, they discovered that industry consists not only of machinery but also of a thing called The Human Factor; and now, in 1936, they even begin to wonder whether it's really necessary to bully the old cultured workers! Well, better late than never.

To come back to Western Europe and England. It is up to the nation to make the transition to the new order more or less painful. It is entirely a matter of preparedness—or unpreparedness. The more obstinately the ruling classes stick to the habitual uncritical conception of society, the longer and bitterer will be the conflict, the more emotionally unsettled will be the new rulers, the slower the recovery. But the final result will be the same: some kind of Planned Order.

In 1936 my sixth book, *Surprise Item*, came out. The ideological theme of it is the clash between the doctrine of hardness implicit in Communism, and the traditional conceptions of kindness and humaneness.

Communism wages war not only with Kings and Capitalists, but also with religion and morality as it exists now, i.e., class morality. Hence the general outcry: "But they're inhuman! They're out to kill kindness!"

As a matter of fact, they are not. Communism is out not to kill kindness, but to revise it. And it is high time this was done, for at present the notion of kindness is so overgrown with hypocrisy and sentimentality that people—I mean civilised, better-class people—cannot distinguish it from ordinary trivial politeness. That sentence which I have quoted already: "He's so kind, he's given me a lift," is characteristic of the moral confusion of our civilisation. Everyone will call you unkind if you kick a dog that annoys you, or show a bore that you are fed up with his jabbering, or express the wish that idiots should be put to sleep, or simply refuse to switch on the ray of benevolence in your eyes when discussing the weather with a stranger (I am speaking from personal experience). But if you reduce the wages of your servants or workmen because you know that they cannot leave you, anyhow; if you do not help a good friend in dire need because you must save up to buy that enviable property in Surrey; if of two youths who have applied for work you choose not the one who needs it but the one whose uncle is related to Lady So-and-so—then no one will dream of calling you unkind. Why, you are doing what everybody does; you

are behaving in a business-like way; kindness does not come in at all. . . . I have seen genuine kindness because I have seen hard life; and this is why at the thought of the distortion to which this notion is subjected I grow as emotional as any Bolshevik, and begin to wish that a Reign of Terror were established for a month or so in the "decent" quarters of London and other towns in England and elsewhere. That might teach people the real meaning of the words Human and Kind.

To return to *Surprise Item*. Judging by what my private readers tell me, it is not worse than any of my previous books, and more "interesting" than most of them. Yet it was a complete flop. It had an awful press, which was partly due to bad luck: it missed practically all the intelligent critics, and the unintelligent ones could not but dislike it, since it was not meant for them. "I am sick of all that talk about Marxism and supermen," wrote one of them (and I hope he spoke literally). Another accused me of Communist propaganda; a third of an ambiguous attitude to Communism; and so forth.\* As for the public, it confined itself to not buying the book.

The English-reading public—I am speaking of the Large Public which makes and unmakes the fortunes of us authors—is very tolerant. It can stand a lot—breakfasts extending over thirty pages, descriptions longer than the Edgware Road, *papier-mâché* adventures, ludicrously impossible dramas, and oceans of sentimentality. And it positively revels in woolly cerebration if it is pleasantly diluted with three parts of vaporous lyricism and ten parts of verbiage. But one thing the novelist is not supposed to do, and that is to think. Thinking, in the serious sense of the word, implies a strain on the brain, and is therefore as much taboo in a novel as it is in a Haslemere or Newcastle drawing-room. To indulge in it, the novelist must have a Special Licence which is only granted, as

\* This is as it should be. If you ever come across the publisher's file of *Heart's Harrow*, a French novel translated about 1930, you will see on the same page two reviews, one of which begins: "This is the story of an ordinary woman and two extraordinary men," and the other: "This is the story about an extraordinary woman and two ordinary men."

quite an exceptional favour, to very big people, once in ten years or so. At present only two men—H. G. Wells and Aldous Huxley—hold such licences, and, of course, it was frightfully naïve of me to hope that I, whose name is hardly known to one reader in a hundred, would be permitted to share their privilege.

Now, the public is too vast and impersonal an entity to be worth criticising: one might as well find fault with the loose and crooked shape of the British Isles! But it is much easier to formulate a judgment about the limited group of people who lead—or pretend to lead—the public opinion in literary matters.

Firstly, the *Literary Critics*. As little can be said about them as about architects, doctors or Naval officers. They do their best. They have a sense of responsibility, and it does matter to them what they say. To be praised by them is a pleasure, however philosophical one may try to be; to be blamed, a mixed pleasure. I have had that latter experience twice: once with *Matthew's Passion*, when one of them pointed out an important mistake in construction, which I knew was there, but on which I could not put my finger; and once with *The Greatest of These*, when the critic of *The Times Literary Supplement* ferreted out an insincerity which I was certain no one would ever spot: even my wife, an excellent judge of my books, had missed it. On these occasions you feel as when your opponent in a game of tennis makes a fine stroke which you cannot return. You are annoyed with yourself (and a little with him, although you won't acknowledge that), but you also feel like crying: "Well done!"

So much for the Literary Critics. Apart from them, outweighing them by far in numbers, are the other reviewers: the *Bloomsbury Set*—top-heavy, pompous intellectuals stuffed with theories and quotations, the Wise Chickens of Literature; the *High-class Entertainers*—sparkling, witty, with an engaging intimate manner, and easy, oh, so easy; the *Men in the Street*—jovial, blustering, chock-full of beer, beef and horse sense; the *Bright Young Things*, charmingly reckless, perpetually giddy with the feeling of their own importance. They are all glib,

very glib, terrifyingly so; and since in modern reviewing, just as in electioneering and commercial advertising, the gift of the gab is all that matters, one should not really blame them for having no intelligence and no sense of value.

As I was finishing the fifth and last version of this book an officer of Scotland Yard called on me in connection with my naturalisation. At first he was stiff and formal.

"What's your full name?"

I spelt my surname. I respelt it. I pointed out that Nikolai is the same as Nicholas.

"When were you born?"

"In 1890."

He promptly caught me: I ought to have said 1889, I had muddled up the year.

"Are you married? How many children?"

These two questions I answered correctly. I was not sure about the age of my children and had to consult my wife.

"Now tell me all about yourself," he said, and I proceeded to give him an outline of this autobiography. He listened, making notes and interjecting questions: they were rather subtle, so that I did not notice at once that he was using my own story to check up on me. Carried away by a reminiscent mood I told him some of the amusing incidents of my career. He chuckled, and I saw him gradually unstiffen. When I mentioned that I had contemplated going to Abyssinia, a glint of curiosity appeared in his eyes.

"Abyssinia?" he asked. "Why Abyssinia?"

I told him why; he chuckled again, and at one point of my narrative burst into quite unofficial laughter. After that the interview went swimmingly. When it came to the ticklish point of my having possessed a Soviet passport, I said:

"Had you, Mister"—pointing a stern finger at his chest—"lived five years in that bloody Newcastle as I have, and worked in that bloody office as I have, you too would have been ready to go anywhere: to the Bolsheviks, the Mensheviks or even the Whites."

He did not quite know how to take this concluding sally,

but as he apparently sympathised with me about my office, he pretended to scan his note-book and passed quickly to the literary part of my career. He was a bit literary himself, having tried his hand at adventure stories, so we found plenty to say to each other about books, the value of fiction, the cinema, the B.B.C. and so on. At length he glanced at his watch and got up.

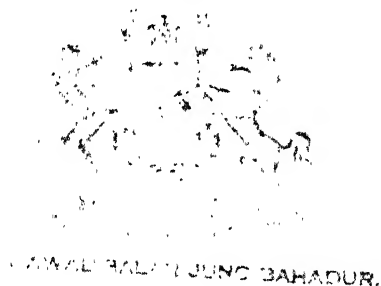
"I wonder," he said smiling, "whether I can describe you as responsible and respectable. What d'you say?"

"I don't understand what 'responsible' means," I confessed. "And I doubt very much whether I'm respectable."

"Oh why? Do you run after women?" The question came pat, his smile was gone, his eyes lit up with that famous Scotland Yard look which has confounded so many wrong-doers.

"No, I don't," I said modestly. "But I often want to."

Whereupon we both had a good laugh, and parted friends.



## THE PRESENT

SO here I am, a man whose profession is Literature, whose hobby is personal relationships, and whose aspiration is to become himself, entirely himself. I do not know, and am not interested to know, whether I am good or bad, selfish or unselfish, weak or strong, and so forth. I avoid thinking in these terms, for they are utterly unreal, mere words which everyone interprets in his own arbitrary way—arbitrary and vague.

Most of the so-called Big Problems leave me indifferent, or at any rate do not occupy my thoughts. Here is an imaginary interview with a Special Correspondent who never called on me:

He: "What do you think about the League of Nations?"

I: "Nothing, except that there is no League of Nations. There may be in the future, I can't tell."

He: "And what are your opinions on home politics?"

I: "I think that instead of decorating and redecorating a house which is crumbling, the landlords ought to hurry up with the construction of a new one. It will be safer and cheaper in the end."

He: "Does this mean that you are a Socialist? Or a Communist?"

I: "Oh no. I'm not a party man. I am myself."

He: "Still, I suppose you have some ideas as to what ought to be done in the way of reforms?"

I: "Plenty of ideas! Scores of them, one better than the other! Only, so long as nobody wants to consult me I can't be bothered to think them out. That would be futile."

He [*hesitatingly*]: "I see. . . . And what are your views on Fascism?"

I: "I have none, because I don't know how Fascism works or what it's leading to."

He: "And on Hitler?"

I: "None, except that I don't like his face. . . . But must I have opinions on Fascism and Hitler?"

He: "No, you needn't, of course, but most people have. . . . I suppose you're interested in God and the Universe and things like that?"

I: "No. I'm not ready to cope with them yet, and I'm afraid of going wrong if I start too early."

He: "Then what *are* you interested in?"

I: "It depends. Before you came in, for instance, I was rehearsing the arguments which might induce my wife to go to Marjorie's for the week-end. They are excellent arguments, and yet I'm afraid she won't go, because she's over-conscientious and says she has work to do. Then I happened to glance down at my shoes and the question came to my mind: How does one get new shoes if one can't afford to buy them? To which the answer was: Someone may give me a pair. And as in the past Denis had given me one, I started thinking of Denis, or rather feeling him, his bulky, bearish figure and that sense of calm which emanates from physically very strong men. After that I thought of Winifred Holtby's *South Riding*, which I finished last night, and which is a lovely novel, lovely and beautifully written; and that set me thinking about the title for this autobiography. The best title would be: *Search for the Self*, but then it's not a selling one. At that moment you came in, and at once I felt awkward and tongue-tied. I wondered why, but I wondered a little too late: I had missed the inception of that feeling, and now I can't catch it any more. . . . So you see I'm interested in plenty of things, chock-a-block with all sorts of interests, aren't I?"

He [*visibly embarrassed*]: "Oh yes, I see that. Well, thank you and good-bye." (Snaps his note-book and leaves.)

I was perfectly truthful when I said that I was not interested in God. What is the use of my speculating on God, and how can I possibly form an adequate idea about Him, if I do not even know myself, let alone my wife? I am inclined to believe that there is a spiritual entity transcending and infinitely superior to the human mind or the sum total of human minds;



I am prepared to admit that on a very high level of development man becomes capable of divining, if only for one revelatory moment, the purposes of that entity; but in my present state of muddle and ignorance I shall not attempt to do so. I shall wait; there is no hurry, God and the Universe won't mind my waiting. Only when I have put my mental mechanism in order and become its master—if ever I get as far as that—shall I be able to pass to the study of celestial mechanics.

I have no problems except a practical one: money. My books do not sell; I work like a nigger, my wife is slowly ruining her eyesight with sewing; yet we earn a little less than the minimum on which a family of four can exist; and so from time to time, at long intervals, I have to borrow from my friends, or rather, since repayment is problematical, sponge on them. Which is hateful, of course. But then what else can one do? *La plus belle fille du monde ne peut donner plus que ce qu'elle a.*

And this is where Arthur's method comes in. I cannot alter the fact of my impecuniousness, since success depends on Time and Chance rather than on man's resolution. But I can and must stop worrying about money and pitying myself, for it is a wrong state of mind, wrong inasmuch as it saps one's vitality (waste of energy!), weakens one's relations with people, and lowers one's capacity for work. All through the years of my long failure I have fought that worrying disposition of mine, and I achieved nothing, less than nothing: I was worse towards the end than I had been at the beginning; whereas Arthur's method, although I have only practised it for twenty months, has helped me a lot. For "seeing a thing is changing it." Not only has this method steadied my thoughts and introduced some order into that loose trinity of mine, body, emotion, intellect; but it is changing the tone, colour and substance of my direct perception of life by giving me a sense of fundamental self-assurance. If mental states could be measured mathematically, I would say that in those twenty months I have reduced my worrying by about two-thirds. What that

means only those can fully appreciate who are familiar with the sensation of living month after month and year after year with a constant weight on their heart and mind. To me that settles the question of the value of the method once and for all. Therefore when Vincent, spilling cigarette-ash all round him, sipping his whisky-and-soda, and flashing his eyes with friendly fierceness, predicts that my navel-gazing will make me inhuman, dogmatic, more intolerant than I am now, soft-brained and generally revolting, I only smile. I know better: I know that no man can possibly be the worse for getting rid of the toxins of weariness. "Oh, you Russian philosophers are hopeless," Vincent snorts, and to regain his composure opens a bottle of vintage hock, which promptly reduces me to a state of silly beatitude. "Ah, you're getting human now," he remarks with satisfaction, and we talk—that is to say, he asks questions which he answers himself, I listen with a smile of repletion on my lips, and we both enjoy our conversation.

Having assimilated as much Russian and English culture as it was given me to take in, I see that culture, in contradistinction to civilisation, is the same in both countries: its essential values are the same, and even the proportions of those values are the same.

There are several ways of assimilating culture; mine is chiefly through personal relationships. And since in London I have my family and as many friends as I had in Petrograd, England is as much my home and my country as Russia was. When I grow old and dotty—but I do hope they'll put me to sleep before that—I shall perhaps muddle up Piccadilly with Nevsky Avenue and, *horribile dictu*, *Jude the Obscure* with *Crime and Punishment*; but the people who meant much to me will always stand distinctly apart from each other, I shall never confuse them. Behind them there will be a vague group of grey, shabby men with crumpled caps, men whom life has given me no opportunity of knowing or serving; further in the background there will be a forest, a line of hills, an impossibly high snow-peak; and above

it, the blue sky and the sun, the same sun for East and West, the symbol of that universal unity which man, every man, if he looks intently for it, will find in the core of his own Self.



THE END

NAWAZ SALAR JUNG CARATOP





